

SYNERGY MAGAZINE

WINTER 2008

EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES OF CINEMA AND LITERATURE



**HORROR
CULT
DARK ART
DARK CULTURE
ARTHOUSE
FICTION
COLLECTABLES !**

RICHARD DAWKINS—RATIONAL THOUGHT

PENN AND TELLER—BULLSHIT

THE CINEMA OF KIHACHI OKAMOTO

SHAW BROTHERS EXPLOITATIONS FROM THE FAR EAST.

WALERIAN BOROWCZYK AND "LA BETE" (THE BEAST)

H.P LOVECRAFT ON DVD

DEATH NOTE LIVE ACTION FILMS

& LOTS MORE !

SYNERGY COMPENDIUM

OCTOBER 2008

EDITORIAL



This quarter has seen lots of exciting change for Synergy Magazine.

A major development is we have decided to make available a digital edition of the Synergy Compendium—*Free of charge*. This is available for download from the Synergy Website.

Each issue is released at the same time as the print edition and It includes rights for any reader to print a copy for their own personal use and pass a copy to their friends (on a non commercial basis.)

We have tried to make the digital edition as visually appealing as possible with lots of extra content, photographs, screen shots and extra materials (including expanded reviews) but in a format that can be quickly downloaded and easily read even on slower computers. We hope we have struck the right balance and welcome feedback on the digital edition.

I do not believe that digital magazines should take hours to load into your pdf reader and think it is ridiculous to pack a digital magazine with full colour backgrounds which make reading text difficult. We want Synergy to be user friendly !

We do recommend the latest Adobe Acrobat Reader (version 9) and suggest you download it to make the most of the look and feel of the Synergy Compendium Digital Edition.

As part of the development of Synergy we changed our byline to “exploring the boundaries of Cinema and Literature” to better reflect the focus of Synergy Magazine.

While we certainly love cult and horror films, it is also important to give coverage to independent and world cinema and the many other genres of film which come across our desks and hence the magazine has expanded its horizons to cover these as well.



We have also included reviews of key documentaries. In the this issue we have focused on the work of Richard Dawkins since we feel he has a lot of important things to say about the dangers of superstition and prejudice.

Our view has always been that the place for fantasy and imagination is within the novel and cinema not within belief systems.

There is more than enough room to explore the boundaries of the psyche in literature and film without being convinced such things are empirically real and that life should be ruled by them.

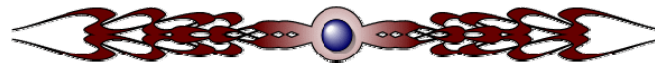
Sad to say the lives of so many fundamentalists these days look like bad B Grade movies anyway. They would certainly be less harmful if that was all they were !!

We hope you enjoy this issue and welcome your comments.

Editorial Team
Synergy Magazine



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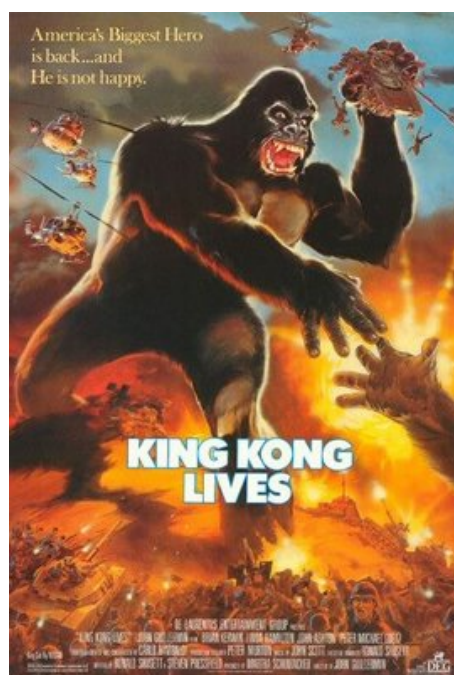
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SPECIAL HIDDEN COMPETITION

Read through this issue and you will find an article offering some special goodies. Send in the code and your details and win some nice stuff !



REGIONS

Synergy Reviews DVDs from all regions.

The R descriptor with each DVD covers the Region.

1 = USA
2 = UK
3 = Asia
4 = Australia
0 = All region.

Blu Ray:

We only review All Region and Region B titles.

While we review the DVD that has been supplied to us (from whatever region), there may be other editions of the film. These may vary in content and quality from what we have described.

Since we are a genre based magazine, the range of titles reviewed will always come from all around the globe.

For international films from the US there are many suppliers including www.amazon.com

For international films from the UK there are many suppliers including www.amazon.co.uk

For rare Asian titles we recommend Asian Cult DVD (<http://asiancult.com>)

For other rare titles we recommend Diabolik DVD (<http://www.diabolikdvd.com/>).

There are a wide variety of retail outlets in Australia including Ezydvd (www.ezydvd.com.au)

Siren titles are available direct from:
www.sirenvisual.com.au.

Madman titles are available from:
www.madman.com.au

REVIEWERS

Synergy has a range of staff reviewers—we also have a number of guest reviewers who regularly supply us reviews.

Their reviews are marked with Reviewer and their initials. At present our guest reviewers are Bob Estreich (B.E.) and Michelle Taylor (M.T.)



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<http://www.synergy-magazine.com>

Synergy Compendiums are published as adjuncts to the website and we recommend you regularly check the website for new reviews, news, articles and materials.

DIGITAL EDITION SPECIAL CONDITIONS

The Digital Edition can be downloaded free from the Synergy Website. It can be printed for personal use only (no commercial use). It cannot be reproduced or distributed commercially with express written permission. Distribution by individuals for non commercial use is permitted, indeed encouraged.

The Digital Edition cannot be altered or articles used without permission, except for small segments for criticism or review as copyright allows.

The copyright for images of DVDs, Books etc remain the property of the individual publishers. They should not be reproduced without permission.

The movie posters used are within the public domain.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Black: Australia's dark cul- ture and entertain- ment magazine.

Whether it is books, movies, music, television, games, comics, alternative lifestyles, fashion, paranormal, occult, or true crime, if it's dark, it will be in BLACK.



BLACK includes:

Interviews with celebrities, authors, musicians, and artists.

Columns on everything from Aussie horror to bizarre medical cases.

News, political, lifestyle, and pop culture articles.

Book, movie, and game reviews.

Dark short stories.

and much more!

At most Australian newsagents or via:

<http://www.brimstonepress.com.au/black.htm>

With Eyes on Beijing—Ears Turn Towards China's Underground Culture.

With the world's eyes turned towards China for the start of this week's Olympic Games, ears turn towards today's Chinese underground rock scene. This is China's subculture.

When Chicago-based musician, producer and label owner Martin Atkins (member of PiL, Pigface, Killing Joke, etc) visited Beijing in the fall of 2006, he had no idea what to expect. What he found was a thriving underground culture of rock bands that reminded him of his time in London in the late '70s, and of the downtown scene in early '80s NYC. He signed several bands while he was there, shot 80 hours of video footage, and rented out High End Sound Studios, where he recorded tracks from well over a dozen bands. He recorded live shows at the D-22 club--a venue that embodies the spirit that CBGBs had when Martin arrived in NYC over 25 years ago--just as news of the final show at the legendary NY nightclub was breaking on CNN.

The entire experience is best revealed in '16 Days in China' where Atkins documents his 2006 trip to Beijing. Here he recorded the cream of the Beijing music scene crop. The DVD features exclusive studio footage including the recording of the China Dub Soundsystem album, and upcoming Chinese artists such as Snapline, The Subs, and P.K.14. It also contains music videos, cultural commentary, exclusive music, and more.

Absorbing all of this, Atkins set out to create an album that reflected what he was seeing and hearing in Beijing. Pushing the envelope and risking the easy camaraderie with the avant-garde, he chose to bring in traditional Chinese musicians and instruments and Tibetan singers for a fuller picture. The results are two very different collections of contemporary Chinese music:

'Look Directly Into The Sun' features 18 Beijing pop, punk and rock bands. Members of Snapline, China MC Brothers and Carsick Cars are heavily featured on Martin's China Dub album as well. Carsick Cars toured Europe and played Vienna, Prague and London opening for Sonic Youth. The Scoff, PK-14 and Joyside opened for Nine Inch Nails at last year's Beijing Pop Festival. This compilation features the bands that are front and center in the emergence of the Beijing underground beyond China. " 'Look Directly Into The Sun' ... is one of those increasingly rare rock surprises--a collection with enough wit, sass, and smart noise to belong with the post punk classics of 25 years ago." - NPR's "Fresh Air"

Martin Atkins' China Dub Soundsystem, 'Made In China' 'Made In China' is an incredible collision of traditional instrumentation and post-punk, dub and experimentation. Recording the elements separately, and waiting to mix and match them together after returning to his Mattress Factory Studios in Chicago, Atkins was able to keep the performances on both sides uncontaminated by any expectations of the final result. The finished album is probably the most creative and effective musical collaboration that Atkins has spearheaded since 'Gub' by Pigface, Atkins' long-running musical collective.

Complete Info for '16 Days in China':

<http://mvdb2b.com/item.php?s=MVDV4758>

Al Adamson's DRACULA VS. FRANKENSTEIN Soundtrack



Elysee Productions has announced the forthcoming original soundtrack release, Al Adamson's DRACULA VS. FRANKENSTEIN (1971), music composed and conducted by William Lava.

Independent-International Pictures archived the original mono mixdown scoring masters from which this CD is produced. Every Lava composition is intact including a cue that was never used in the film! This 1000 pressing limited edition CD will include "Audio Liner Notes" - a track featuring producer Samuel M. Sherman discussing behind the scenes details of the musical score.

Also included is the Independent-International Pictures Radio Spot-O-Rama, a compilation of horror and exploitation radio spots from the studio's archives. The CD will be available on October 15, 2008.

Web: <http://www.elyseeproductions.com/>

Jake's Wake Dorchester Publishing

Pastor Jake promised his followers everlasting life...he just didn't say what kind. So when the small-town televangelist and con man climbs out of his coffin at his own wake, it becomes Judgment Day for everyone gathered to mourn—or celebrate—his death. Jake is back, in the rotting flesh, filled with anger and vengeance. And accompanied by demons even more frightening than himself. What follows is a long night of endless terror, a blood-drenched rampage by the man not even death could stop.

Horror icon John Skipp launched his career as half of the New York Times bestselling partnership Skipp and Spector in 1986. What followed was an incredible string of bestselling novels that introduced the genre of splatterpunk and changed the face of horror fiction forever.

Then, in the mid-90s Skipp seemingly disappeared from the horror scene, leaving millions

of fans to await the return of this horror godfather.

Be sure to check out the haunting trailer here, and please feel free to add the trailer or links to the trailer to your site.

Trailer: <http://www.dorchesterpub.com/Dorch/SpecialFeatures.cfm?ID=2525>

Now he's teamed up with brilliant newcomer Cody Goodfellow (author of the cult Lovecraftian epics RADIANT DAWN and RAVENOUS DUSK), to map out the new frontier of fear, and instigate a whole new reign of terror for the horror-loving reader.

New Wallflower Press Website Launched August 2008



The new site offers online customers a whopping 15% off all purchases, plus many other special features. The friends' area provides exclusive news, competitions, giveaways and a special author's forum, plus anyone who becomes a friend can enjoy an even bigger discount on online purchases.

The news and events pages will provide listings for all our launches and the latest festivals and film seasons. There is also a special area for academics and an online press office for journalists.

Be sure to visit today to find out more...

Web : <http://www.wallflowerpress.co.uk/>

Dying Breed

In Australian Cinemas 6th November 2008

Featuring rising Australian stars: Leigh Whannell, Nathan Phillips, Melanie Vallejo and Mirrah Foulkes.

Tasmania, Australia, the world's most isolated island. It's rumoured deep within Tasmania's wilderness an ancient species known as the Tasmanian Tiger is alive and breeding. Yet modern science refuses to believe such a creature now exists since no witnesses have ever been able to prove it.

That is until Zoology student, Nina (Mirrah Foulkes) attempts to break Tasmania's impenetrable forests and reveal the tiger's existence to be true.

Determined to prove science wrong Nina, along with her partner, Matt (Leigh Whannell), his mate Jack (Nathan Phillips), and girlfriend Rebecca (Melanie Vallejo) set out to explore the wilderness, but instead encounters the island's reigning breed...who stands on two legs, not four.

Web: <http://www.dyingbreed.com.au/>

Iron Sky

In 1945 the Nazis went to the Moon. In 2018, they are coming back.

A two-and-a-half minute teaser for the dark science fiction comedy Iron Sky was released today at <http://www.ironsky.net/>

Iron Sky will be the second film by the creators of Star Wreck, the most popular Internet feature film of all time, as well as the most popular Finnish film ever. Over 8 million people have downloaded Star Wreck since its free Internet release in 2005.

The film was eventually distributed by Universal Pictures as a premium DVD.

Iron Sky is a pitch-black science fiction comedy that holds nothing sacred. It combines the dry irony of Dr. Strangelove with the visual style of invasion films such as Independence Day. Finns are known for their dark wit, perhaps due to their history successively under the oppressive thumb of Sweden, Russia, and the Nazis.

Star Wreck repeatedly skewered Russia (and was wildly successful there), and Iron Sky continues in the same vein of mocking totalitarianism.

Says director Timo Vuorensola: "Iron Sky is a story about conformity: those who want to conform, those who want to make others conform, and those who refuse to conform." The earlier film Star Wreck was a huge collaborative process, with over 3,000 people participating.

While the process for that film was ad-hoc and fairly chaotic, Iron Sky is being made with the



help of a new web site www.wreckAMovie.com whose aim is to enable this sort of Internet-era collaborative film-making. "With Star Wreck, we learned how to gather large numbers of volunteers, to break tasks down and create a film in a distributed manner", Vuorensola describes the process. "For our second film, we decided to take all that knowledge and automate it. WreckAMovie.com is our collaborative film-making web site. WreckAMovie is being used today to make Iron Sky as well as the Finnish horror film Sauna (<http://www.washyoursins.com/>), and it is available for other films as well. With Iron Sky, Vuorensola expects to gather an active, vibrant and collaborative community of 10,000 people around the project. While the final product will be Hollywood quality, the model has more in common with social networking and Internet movements such as Creative Commons and Open Source. Iron Sky is being filmed in English, with an estimated budget of 5 million dollars. The Star Wreck filmmakers have teamed up with veteran producers Tero Kaukomaa and Petri Jokiranta, whose previous film Man's Job was Finland's official entry for the Oscars this year.

The script is written by Johanna Sinisalo, Finland's best-known science fiction writer. Her first novel Not Before Sundown has been translated to 20 languages, and has received both domestic and international awards. The Producers will be in Cannes financing Iron Sky with a fresh script as well as the teaser and Wreck A Movie - platform.

K.Gordon Murray

A superb upcoming DVD on the films of K.Gordon Murray.

See trailer at:

<http://www.kgordonmurraymovie.org/>

There is also a great site about his movies at:

<http://www.kgordonmurray.com/>



The Movies Club is an exciting initiative, to setup a member driven movie studio.

Members can become emotionally and financially involved at all levels of the movie- Scouting, buying, releasing, and influencing real independent movies.

Members can profit from the success of these movies or re-invest.

"The Movies Club Co-Op Lets Film Buffs Play Mogul", Robert Andrews.

It is a co-operative that lets movie fans buy independent movie rights, and manage the release at cinemas and on DVD. The club is owned, funded and managed online entirely by its members. Our aim is to recruit at least 50,000 film enthusiasts from across the world: to create a member driven movie Studio, all for 15 membership. For the price of a new DVD you can be part of movie history.

The Movies Club was setup early 2008 as a microfinance initiative. What is unique is that it is built entirely on the concept that the members know best, through collective decision making. Wisdom of the crowds, so to speak. All members are equal partners, so if you own a share then no one else has more power than you.

Like the Music industry the existing business models in the movie industry are broken. So The Movies Club sets out to prove that social commerce can work better than existing traditional models. Who says that a Hollywood studio mogul knows more than say 50,000 plus members of the public.

Web: <http://themoviesclub.com>

Midnite Movies

Web: <http://www.midnitemoviesdvd.com/>

20th Century Fox and MGM Official Website

Superb site dedicated to the Midnite movies series.

Blu Ray



One of the hardest things for Australian's interested in Blu Ray is the limited range of titles available in Australia. However, the reality is at around 80% of Blu Ray DVDs are actually region free !

The best way to find out about new Blu Ray releases is www.bluray.com. Not only do they describe each release but outline what region they are encoded in.

While Australia falls in the Region B category for Blu Ray (Blu Ray regions are different from DVD regions), Australian players including the Playstation 3 will play all/no region titles without any problems, so there is a world of titles available directly from the US.

If you are daring, the first signs of modded Blu Ray players are hitting the market. For example <http://www.multiregionupgrades.com> is offering both mods and kits you can install yourself. These only seem to apply to a small range of Blu Ray players and not to the Playstation 3.

Remake of Plan 9 from Outer Space !

Web: <http://www.plan9movie.com>

Now, in time to coincide with the 50th anniversary of "Plan 9 From Outer Space", director John Johnson – along with his production company, Darkstone Entertainment – is poised to remake the classic film. Simply titled "Plan 9", the remake will be a serious-minded retelling of the original story, paying homage to the spirit of Wood's film without resorting to camp or parody.

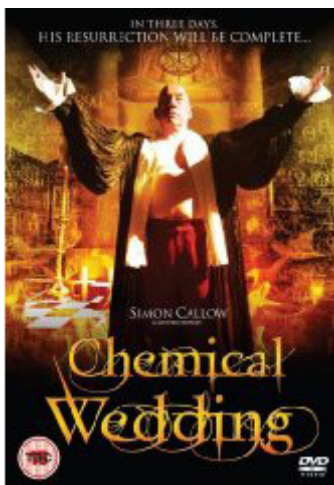
The film will focus on the horror and science fiction aspects of the original, but will also be largely character-driven.



Johnson's goal for "Plan 9" is to make a film that honors not only the original source material, but also Ed Wood's intentions when he made "Plan 9 From Outer Space". Wood's plan was to make a very scary sci-fi/horror film, and Johnson wishes to do exactly that – create a film that Wood would have enjoyed, or perhaps even made himself, if not bound by the technological limitations placed on filmmakers 50 years ago.

Chemical Wedding

The supernatural horror thriller *Chemical Wedding* has been released on UK Cinemas to wide applause. The Soundtrack has already been selling well with the DVD hitting the UK shelves in September. This is no news of an Australian release as yet.



Based on an original screenplay by Bruce Dickinson, the film directed by Julian Doyle, veteran second unit director and editor of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*, *Time Bandits* and Monty Python's *The Life of Brian*. Julian wrote and directed Maiden's partially animated promotional video 'Can I Play With Madness'.

Chemical Wedding stars Simon Callow as a reincarnation of Aleister Crowley, dubbed 'the most evil man in Britain.'

Crowley was a major Edwardian figure and a scandalous character. A Cambridge graduate,

he became an infamous mystic and occult scholar and although he died in 1947, his books are still in print and he remains a major focus for the occult world.

In the film, Crowley's spirit is re-animated by a superconductor mainframe, transforming the shy and stuttering Professor Haddo (Callow) into the charismatic but sexually depraved Crowley who wreaks havoc with the students and faculty of today's Cambridge campus. The cast will be rounded out with cameos from Dickinson and other Python regulars.



Web: www.worldcinemafoundation.org

The World Cinema Foundation (WCF) is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and restoring neglected films from around the world – in particular, those countries lacking the financial and technical ability to do so.

Established by Martin Scorsese, the Foundation supports and encourages preservation efforts to save the worldwide patrimony of films, ensuring that they are preserved, seen and shared. Its goal is to defend the body and spirit of cinema in the belief that preserving works of the past can encourage future generations to treat film as a universal form of expression.

Cinema is an international language, an international art, but, above all, it is a source of enlightenment. There are wonderful, remarkable films, past and present, from Mexico, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and Central Asia that deserve to be known and seen. Martin Scorsese has created the World Cinema Foundation with the specific purpose of calling attention to the global cause of film preservation.

Composed of filmmakers from every continent, the World Cinema Foundation breathes life into the idea that when a cultural patrimony is lost, no matter how small or supposedly "marginal" the country might be, we are all poorer for it.

SIDESHOW COLLECTIBLES GIVEAWAY



Sideshow Collectibles have provided us with a limited edition Saw Doll to giveaway.

This is a special giveaway for the Digital and Print editions of Synergy.

It has NOT been advertised on the website !!

Send a message to:

promotions@synergy-magazine.com and include **SAW 621** in the subject.

Make sure you include your name, full address and email address.

This is a AUSTRALIA ONLY giveaway, so send those emails in !

(Sorry, international readers, we do include international giveaways on the website !)

This is a truly awesome item (see our review in Toys and Collectables), it stands 15" tall and is built on a vinyl doll body capable of sitting and standing poses.

The arms have a clever rotating swivel joint at the elbows that allow bent arm or straight arm poses, and the figure is ball-jointed at the neck, shoulders, and hips.

The SAW vinyl doll is dressed to kill in his dapper black suit and red bowtie and makes a perfectly horrific addition to any collection.

This is a limited edition of 150 ONLY and includes a unique feature available nowhere else: **eerie bright red shoes**.

All entries must be in by September 30th 12 pm (Sydney Time, Australia)



COMPETITIONS & GIVEAWAY



DEATH NOTE COMPETITION

We have a special competition from Madman Entertainment.

It runs from **1st September to 1st October**.

We will draw four winners, up for grabs are:

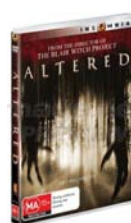


2 x Sets of all three Live Action Death Note Films

Death Note, Death Note II and L Change the World

2 Sets of the Five Volumes of Death Note Anime Series.

Send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with "Death Note October" in the subject line, make sure you include your full name, email and mailing address in the email.



INSOMNIA COMPETITION

Competition Ends 31st October

The Insomnia range includes titles The Descent, Altered, The Hitcher, Severance, Shadow Puppets and Dark Ride.

We have 3 Sets to giveaway - Each with 1 of the six Insomnia edition DVDs.

Send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with "Halloween Insomnia" in the subject line, make sure you include your full name, email and mailing address in the email.



A special thanks to Madman Entertainment for supplying these packages !

A special thanks to Icon Entertainment for supplying these packages !

RICHARD DAWKINS - THE IMPORTANCE OF RATIONAL THOUGHT

Richard Dawkins Collection - Rational Thought
Siren Visual
R4 DVD Box Set

This collection brings together the works of Richard Dawkins:

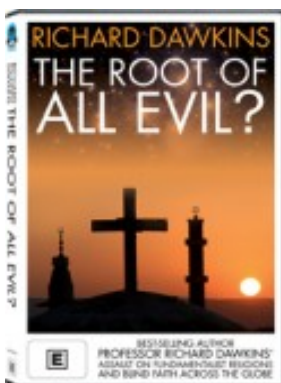
The best-selling documentary The Root of All Evil?

Six hours of uncut interviews from the making of The Root of All Evil?

The Enemies of Reason

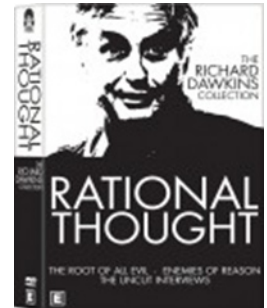
Richard Dawkins is a controversial scientist, atheist and rationalist, while he originally focused his work on theoretical science, as he saw the world descending into religious wars and superstition he felt compelled to act. Dawkins is a unique figure in that he is a highly respected scientist and academic whose call to rationalism and espousal of the rigours of the scientific method is not driven by a personal agenda but by seeing the cost in terms of human suffering caused by religion and superstition.

As Dawkins argues passionately in the Root of all Evil it is too easy to simply write off terrorism as "religious extremism" and not appreciate that martyrdom is at the heart of all monotheistic religions. It is not a matter of only extreme or fundamentalist religions and cults being a risk to humanity, but that any philosophy or religion that places faith in place of rational thought can just as easily move from benign to destructive in a simple step. While we may see the Pope as a nice fellow working for peace, it is too easy to forget that past Popes encouraged the whole-



sale slaughter of the innocent in various crusades and inquisitions. As Dawkins argues it is not simply the extremes of religion that are the problem but the whole underpinning of religious thinking which is based on faith and dogma rather than on

empirical evidence uncovered by rigorous study and testing. Too often the excuse is used that science is fine "in its place" and that theology also has a place also i.e. "Where matter ends, spirit begins". However, the truth is that if we cannot prove the existence of anything beyond matter then it should not be accepted at all, period. As Dawkins discusses we cannot use a "negative" to prove a case, just because we cannot prove Thor or Ra do not exist does not make them real and so it is with any religious, new age or paranormal phenomenon.



In the 21st Century we must base our democracy on a secular worldview grounded in the scientific method otherwise we will find ourselves slipping back into primitive and superstitious ways of thinking with disastrous results. On the world stage the three "ugly sisters" of Judaism, Islam and Christianity are battling it out and causing immense suffering along the way, whether by direct means (such as terrorism) or covert means (such as Catholicism rejecting condoms in the third world and causing death via AIDS). Dawkins calls it as he sees it in this impressive and powerful documentary and includes some six hours of further uncut interviews on the second DVD.

What is presented on The Root of All Evil is a harrowing experience, when we come face to face with Islamic extremists, mentally unhinged creationists and other religious fanatics it is shocking to see how such hatred and irrational thought can survive today and moreover that so many hold fast to such delusions. As Dawkins rightly argues the issue must be in the education of children and we need to demand secular education for all children and perhaps even go as far as see the religious indoctrination of children as tantamount to child abuse.

In the Enemies of Reason Dawkins takes aim at the new age, alternative health and related paranormal groups such as spiritualists.

"The time has come for people of reason to say: enough is enough. Religious faith discourages independent thought, it's divisive, and it's dangerous. "

Prof. Richard Dawkins

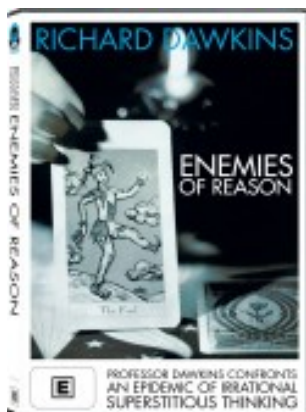
Again, it would be too easy to simply write these off as harmless practises by eccentrics, however, this is not the case.

Once reason is jettisoned and replaced with doctrine and dogma or, as in the case of the new age, by personal subjective experience then anything goes and indeed madness can truly reign.

As can be readily seen in Dawkins's presentation of the new age, many of its proponents seem to be on the edge of sanity and have beliefs which border on the truly delusional ranging from angelic healing to 12 strain DNA resequencing by meditation!

Not only can these practises do immense financial harm to the pockets of those buying into them but to their health and mental well being as well. The major danger is that the new age appeals to those in need, those seeking meaning, while traditional religion has lost its appeal the free and subjective nature of the new age seems to fill the gap.

The problem, of course, is so many seem to be exploiting the gullible with ludicrous gimmicks, untested cures and bizarre techniques. Moreover, so often those who are mentally suffering are exploited by spiritualists and others who promise solace but offer nothing but pipedreams. Whether these people are self deluded or deliberately deceptive is irrelevant as the suffering that results is just as real.



While the new age can be seen as risky, the danger with alternative medicine is even greater. While mainstream medicine requires years of clinical testing and practitioner training, anyone can place up a shingle and claim to have a new type of therapy.



The ill, infirm and dying are regularly exploited by every type of alternative therapy imaginable from bizarre massage techniques to angelic healing, extreme diets to herbs and potions. The risks is that many will waste valuable time and money on such treatments when mainstream treatment could have helped their problems and in many cases this delay could be a matter of life and death. Furthermore, sadly, instead of the terminally ill facing the nature of their condition and making peace with themselves and their loved ones, they spend their last days travelling through the circus of supposed cures in search of miracles.

In *Enemies of Reason* Dawkins makes a strong case for a need for a return to rational and critical thinking. Too often the media is interested in sensational anti-science hysteria and allows new age cures off the hook by placing them uncritically in the lifestyle category. The West is consumed with hype regarding new diets, fads and miracle cures and spends billions of dollars each year on quackery, if just some of these funds were directed to mainstream medicine discoveries could be made in years rather than decades.

In each of Dawkins documentaries he calls us to return to rationality and to critically examine the beliefs we inherit from family and culture.

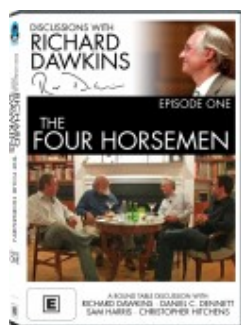
He is not a closed minded bigot, he is more than willing to accept that science is an open ended process and new discoveries are regularly being made. However, until science finds proof, even slight, of the "spiritual" verities claimed by religion and the new age, then we must treat them with skepticism.

As individuals and as a culture we must place the critical experimental method of scientific enquiry at the foundation of our worldview, if we do not then there will be little hope of resolving the current world crisis of terrorism and extremism.

This is a serious matter, the issue is not one of a philosophical debate between atheists and believers, it is a debate about the very foundations of our democracy and the future we wish to have and at present it seems, sadly, that the fundamentalists and extremists are having a field day and hence this series comes none too soon.

The Four Horsemen

In August Siren is also releasing the first installment of the Discussions with Richard Dawkins series is a unique fly-on-the-wall opportunity to observe four of today's leading religious critics.



On 30 September 2007, Professor Richard Dawkins (The God Delusion) brought together the best-selling authors Christopher Hitchens (God Is Not Great), Sam Harris (Letter to a Christian Nation, The End of Faith) and Daniel C. Dennett (Breaking the Spell) for an unmoderated two-hour discussion.

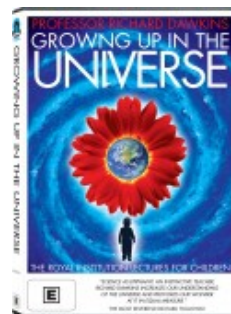
In this conversation the group trades stories of the public's reaction to their recent books, their unexpected successes, criticisms and common misrepresentations. They discuss the tough questions about religion that face to world today, and propose new strategies for going forward.

Growing Up in the Universe Richard Dawkins

Many people have reaction to Richard Dawkins critique of religion and superstition by arguing that he only offers a negative perspective, tearing down a philosophical foundation without offering anything to replace it. Indeed, many religious commentators have made the rather specious argument that without religions mankind turn into vicious beasts and destroy itself overnight. (Never mind the history of religious persecutions, inquisitions and violence !)

In Growing Up in the Universe Dawkins offers an approach based on science, offering a view of life, the universe and our role within it

based on a scientific worldview. He outlines how ethics can easily be developed from this worldview without the need for supernatural causes.



His presentation is intelligent, informative and entertaining and will interest anyone who wants to understand the scientific model of man's development and his role in the universe. It includes some real gems including discussions of such subjects as Virtual Reality and includes a number of special guests including Douglas Adams.

This is a marvelous series which will appeal to both children and adults, Dawkins explains science in easy to understand terms but does not talk down to his audience and hence is quite a remarkable public speaker and educator.

The Royal Institution Christmas Lectures for Children were founded by Michael Faraday in 1825, with himself as the inaugural lecturer.

The 1991 lecturer was Richard Dawkins, whose five one-hour lectures, originally televised by the BBC, are now available for the first time on DVD, courtesy of RDF.

Richard Dawkins Collection - Rational Thought.

These titles are available in the above set or as separate titles:

Root of All Evil ?
Root of All Evil ? Uncut Interviews
Enemies of Reason.

The Four Horsemen Growing Up in the Universe

Available at **Siren Visual**
Web: <http://www.sirenvisual.com.au>

Ask your local Video Store to have it available for rent and sale.

Indeed, we should encourage local stores to stock this important titles !

GARDENS OF THE NIGHT

DIRECTOR: DAMIAN HARRIS

Gardens of the Night began with two photographs in the mid 1980's. The one on a milk carton was of a small eight-year old girl, smiling at me in black and white, mercifully clueless about her own future, promoting awareness that was meant to help others like her. The second was of a boy on the cover of NEWSWEEK magazine, Kevin Collins, and the headline "Stolen Children". Kevin had gone missing up in San Francisco.

Of the approximately 800,000 children who are reported missing each year, the majority are runaways or youngsters abducted by a parent involved in a custody fight. 50,000 missing children are victims of "stranger abduction", and 100 to 200, like Kevin Collins, are victims of "stereotypical kidnappings" a crime of predatory cruelty usually committed by paedophiles, pornographers, black-market-baby peddlers or childless psychotics bidding desperately for parenthood. Over 40% of these were killed. Half of those "stranger abducted" and "stereotypically kidnapped" were sexually assaulted.

"She was very likely dead", I was told by a councillor at a walk-in shelter I visited on Hollywood Boulevard, "and if not, then she'd be better off dead because she would be the most fucked up teenager now". He was talking about a young girl who'd been missing for over eight years and whose picture was one of the thousands of missing faces that covered the walls; and as the homeless street children came in to change their clothes or get something to eat I made a connection and got the inkling of a story about a missing child from the child's point of view and how that point of view is changed and corrupted as she becomes a teenager.

Two years of research followed travelling all over the United States. In San Francisco I met with Kevin Collin's father David, we spoke about what might have happened to Kevin, how he might have put his trust in a stranger.

I asked him whether he thought his son was alive and he said he thought he was and that



he hoped the person who had him was kind (twenty years later the parents of Madeline McCann would say the exact same thing).

I met with the Child Sex Crimes Units of the New Orleans and San Diego Police Departments. The San Diego Officer called his city the "kiddie porn" capital of the USA. I visited shelters and spoke to the councillors who worked there and the teenagers they looked after.

Eventually I had enough material to write a script, which after much rewriting was strong enough to be considered a film.

I gave it the title Gardens of the Night, which came from a Robert Bridges poem "My delight and thy delight walking, like two angels white, in the gardens of the night".

The date on the draft was 1990; my daughter Ella had just been born.

Eventually in the fall of 2006 producers RD Robb, Pascal Franchott and I faced the probability that despite the strong cast we had assembled the film was going to fall through yet again; however because of technology and the screwed up state of the industry the cost of making independent films had dramatically decreased, so I decided it was now or never and financed it myself.

Gardens of the Night was, as my daughter Ella pointed out, seventeen years old, her age and the age of its heroine Leslie.

The role of Leslie in Gardens of the Night. She was the embodiment of so many children



whose stories I'd heard over the years: Javier who'd been trained to seduce young girls at the beach and lead them back to an older pimp's house where they'd film child porn. Patience who at age twelve had run away from an abusive home and been picked up by a husband and wife whose bed she ended up sharing and who introduced her to a group of adults who used their own children for pornography convincing her it was art. Wendy, who was one of the most beautiful sixteen year old girls I'd ever laid eyes on, she should have been some proud parent's daughter but instead she rode the buses in the evening high on heroin trying to forget the tricks her pimp had made service that day.

The two actresses who played Leslie had the hardest of acting challenges, which is to show through reaction the character's journey.

Ryan Simpkins had been in the Broadway production of *Festen* playing Jeremy Sisto's daughter. Jeremy had been attached to the film not only as an actor but producer as well. He taped himself doing scenes from *Gardens of the Night* with Ryan and sent it to me. She was clearly a very special young actress.

With the role of the younger Leslie there had to be a clear understanding with Ryan's parents about how the performance was going to be got. After a long dinner with Ryan's mother Monique going through the script and discussing how every scene was going to be done we decided to create a second script that would tell the story as both Ryan and Scooter Smith (young Donnie) would understand it. In their version the Tom Arnold character wants to have his own family so takes the children, Kevin Zegers is the older brother, jealous of the attention the younger kids get.

Gillian Jacobs had also been doing a play in New York and was unavailable to audition for



us when we were originally casting, however when the film's start date got pushed and her play ended she was able to come to Los Angeles; she was the embodiment of vulnerability encased in a hard unforgiving exterior, she was Leslie. Trained at Julliard, Gillian was every director's dream actress: intelligent, resourceful and extremely hard working. It was worth the wait for both of these actresses and indeed for the whole cast: Evan Ross and Scooter Smith as Donnie never going to be bettered, nor were Jeremy Sisto, Harold Perrineau, Kevin Zeegers, Tom Arnold or the rest of the cast. My friend John Malkovich had been there since I wrote the script and without him this film wouldn't have happened.

What drew me to this material? A belief that childhood innocence has to be sacred and what we will do as children to hang onto that. How we are drawn to someone with the same wounds; how we cope and survive with those wounds.

How could this be going on in our society? How had we failed these children and how could they believe that this was their lot in life?

I was also interested in the nature of relationships that begin in circumstances like this. I had watched a documentary about survivors of the Holocaust, in particular couples who'd begun relationships in the camps and what had happened to them after they'd left, those that had stayed together and others that hadn't. I thought this a remarkable and fascinating struggle and one that is actually universal, how much are we conditioned by our past and what does it mean to us?

In January 2007 another *Newsweek* cover, two missing boys either side of a bearded man. Shawn Hornbeck and Ben Ownby abducted by Michael Devlin. But this story had a happy ending, these boys were found.

REFLECTIONS ON BULLSHIT !

THE WORK OF PENN & TELLER

Bullshit Series I and II

Penn and Teller

Australian Release (R4)

Siren Visual

Web: <http://www.sirenvisual.com.au>

Penn and Teller's controversial and confronting cable television series has now been released in Australia on DVD thanks to Siren Visual. So far two seasons have been released and I presume more will be on the way. Since Penn and Teller offer a highly inflammatory and idiosyncratic style of entertainment I thought it would be interesting to discuss some of the issues related to their style of presentation.

The Bullshit series are unusual in that they are truly "edutainment", they mix together strong social commentary with biting satire and a vindictive and outrageous sense of humour. While it would be easy to simply write off the extreme comments made by Penn (especially the constant use of insulting names and abuse), it is actually quite clear that the shows themselves are impeccably well researched. They are not "shock jocks" regardless of the amount of venom they regularly shoot. It is quite clear at the outset of the series that they are atheists, rationalists and Libertarians. They are more than willing to attack any extreme, regardless of political, religious or social persuasion. There are a number of things they are not. If you carefully analyse each episode of their work, you find they are not sexist, not racist and not homophobic, indeed they go out of their way to be inclusive in regards to sexuality and deliberately make sexually ambiguous comments. They are very progressive in their thinking, we are shocked because we are in such a conservative culture that we are not used to the Libertarian message being presented in such a dramatic and powerful, if not abrasive manner.

It is clear that they spend a lot of time carefully researching each episode, while the shows seem to move quickly, underlying each program is a wealth of background information and research. When we look at the



shows in season one on alternative health, they carefully examined the evidence, for example, for various so called alternative therapies and showed conclusively how they could not work. (The one on magnetic healing comes to mind as patently ridiculous). While they certainly gave the practitioners "enough rope to hang themselves", it seemed to me time and time again they gave them a chance to present a logical basis for their treatments and yet time and time again they failed to present even a modicum of evidence and worse came across as either deluded or hucksters and perhaps both !

The show on environmentalism in Season One I think showed Penn and Teller at their most impressive. It carefully and objectively presented the case for concern for the environment while denouncing the extreme political agendas of many of the green groups. This balance was impressive, they did not argue a black and white case i.e. anti and pro environmentalism, but argued against extreme environmentalism and for a rational approach to the subject. Again, so many of the spokes people for the green movements, while perhaps well meaning, lacked any credibility and came across as rather out of touch and a little off the wall.

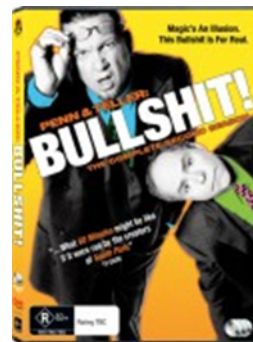
The criticism of Penn and Teller is that they deliberately choose people who seem loopy or wacky and yet if you consider the various individuals they choose in their alternative health episodes, the spiritualist episodes and on the environment, they gave a wide range of so-called alternative authorities chances to present their cases and sadly, the evidence they offered to prove their cases was flimsy at best.



One of the most controversial shows in these two seasons was on PETA, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. It was unusual in that it primarily focused on one organization and only secondarily on animal liberation in general. This episode while certainly explosive was incredibly well researched. Evidence had been mounting for some years about PETA's double standard in denouncing animal shelters for putting animals to sleep and yet doing the same thing within its own organization to animals it could not find homes for. There is no doubt Penn and Teller used some extreme methods to make their point such as playing a Nuremberg Rally soundtrack behind Ingrid Newkirk's (founder of PETA) speeches. However, even this had a context since PETA regularly used images in their advertising of Jewish bodies juxtaposed with dead animals to argue we were in the midst of an "animal holocaust". Clearly this use of images of the millions killed in the holocaust juxtaposed to animals in a meat factory demeaned the death of the so many victims of Nazi violence.

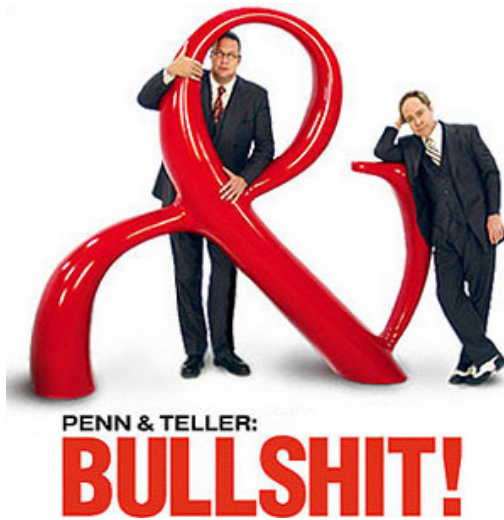
My only criticism with this episode was over vivisection. Penn and Teller rightly argued that animal experimentation is the foundation of modern medical science and cannot be stopped as PETA demands without creating a worldwide medical disaster and an avalanche of human misery. However, I do not necessarily believe the case is black and white, it is not necessarily a dichotomy between PETA (no vivisection) and science (vivisection). Too many scientists are ivory tower academics stuck in the mud who refuse to examine new approaches and there are technological replacements for SOME animal research. For

example, under pressure, many schools now use virtual animal dissection kits and medical schools uses virtual bodies for training. Clearly there is a "third position" of animal harm minimization, however, this would not suit either staid scientists nor PETA. I think that in the case of vivisection since it was being covered as part of a solid investigation of PETA it was not given as much debate as was needed. At the same time, it is obviously difficult to canvass such issues when dealing with such an extreme organization who believes that even having pets is animal abuse. It is clearly hard to sustain a nuanced discussion when the opposition are so utterly off the page in their position.



Generally, Penn and Teller's approach to PETA was spot on and in my mind, PETA does a lot of damage to the potential protection of animals by taking such an extreme position. More and more thinking people want more protection of animals (in the sense of harm minimization) but find PETA's extremism is actually working against meaningful dialogue on the subject. While PETA does not condone violence, it will not condemn it and hence associated organizations such as the Animal Liberation Front continue to use violence to achieve their ends. How can the scientific community dialogue on alternatives to animal research when faced with violence and the fire bombing of their labs.

Another impressively controversial episode was that on the war on drugs and here Penn and Teller take a traditional Libertarian position, the best government rules least. It is offensive that government believe they have some sort of right to stick their noses into our bedrooms, tell us what we can and cannot read and watch and limit what we can put into our bodies. Alcohol and Tobacco cause far more health problems than marijuana yet due to moralistic (read religious) Puritanism, a bizarre war against a natural herb rages. It costs the tax payers of the West millions on millions of dollars each year and puts untold numbers into jail for a victimless crime, it is stupid and unjustifiable.



costs of treating the side effects of drug problems etc, won't people go wild if drugs were legalized ? While the American drug expert in the show claims so, when the European model is examined, where marijuana is allowed, the results were a reduction in drug crime and medical problems since education replaced punishment. Personally I think the next step in the liberation march is the move to cognitive liberty, it is up to us what we do with our minds.

Bullshit is an amazing series, there is so much to challenge, offend, irritate and educate. I would love to see Bullshit study groups in High Schools and Universities. I think our culture would be a better place if there were Bullshit debate clubs in every town, using reason and not emotion, debating issues that are central to our culture's survival. If we replaced Scripture classes with Bullshit debate sessions we would all be much more informed !

Bullshit may be flashy, deliberately offensive, at times abrasive and abusive edutainment but it masks a very serious purpose. Our world is sinking into a morass of irrationalism. Religious extremist want to kill each other, people are still killed over their gender and sexual orientation and sadly, race is still an issue in US politics. Alternative health of every kind is being hawked on every street corner, the most bizarre unproven therapies are being practiced on the sick and dying. Penn and Teller are using the dynamic method of television to force us to reconsider our values. Real democracy is based on individual freedom and that by definition must come from a secular worldview.

As soon as we give space to religious ideology, then we move the centre of our culture

from an evidence based scientific approach to that of subjectivism and when that occurs, social control of various sorts results.

As Penn and Teller clearly show in another of their more confronting episodes, that on terrorism, religious conservatives used and continue to use post 9/11 the fear of terrorism to keep social control. The reality is that while terrorism is a horrific thing and cannot be ignored, the statistical likelihood of being killed in a terrorist attack is substantially lower than the possibility of dying from rotten chicken sandwich or choking on a fish bone. In both the US and Australia this fear has had terribly destructive effects. For example, John Howard used this fear to stay as the prime minister of Australia and to enforce his far right religious values. He literally led a coup in the Liberal party moving it to the extreme right. The results of his homophobic attitudes can be seen in that HIV/AIDS cases increased by 40% from 2000-2005 in Australia. When traditionally Australia was proactive against AIDS, Howard's perverse moral reserve had disastrous results. This could be considered akin to Bush's ludicrous abstinence programs and the effects of the Roman Catholics in Africa denouncing the use of condoms leading to incredible suffering and untold number of deaths.

Penn and Teller should be celebrated for presenting a timely and highly significant message in a dynamic form during a period in which our world is being eaten alive by the cancer of irrationalism and superstition.

I highly recommend you get these two series and watch and debate them with your friends and those you love.

Penn and Teller: Bullshit ! Series 1 (13 Episodes)

Talking to the Dead, Alternative Medicine, Alien Abductions, End of the World, Second Hand Smoke, Baby Bullshit, Sex, Feng Shui, Bottled Water, Creationism, Self Help, ESP, Diets, Ouija Boards, Near Death Experiences, and Environmental Hysteria.

Penn and Teller: Bullshit ! Series 2 (13 Episodes)

PETA, Safety, Business of Love, War on Drugs, Recycling, the Bible, Yoga/Tantric Sex, Fountain of Youth, Death Inc, Profanity, 12 Stepping, Exercise Vs Genetics and Hypnosis.

THE CINEMA OF KIHACHI OKAMOTO

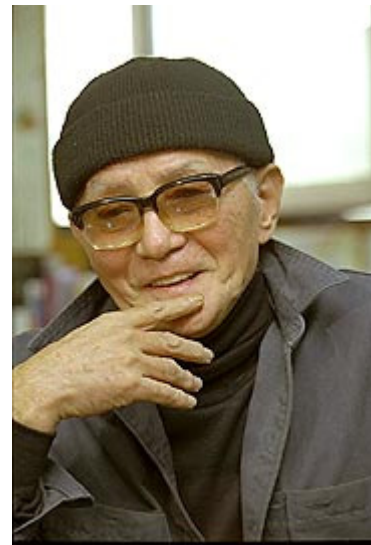
Kihachi Okamoto was born on 17th February 1924, he belonged to a generation which was described as those most likely to be killed. Okamoto was drafted during the very worst of the war when he was a 19-year-old university student. It was 1943 and he was shipped straight to the front. "You could say it's a miracle I survived the war at all, since statistics show that the largest number of people killed were those born, like me, in 1924," he said in a 1977 interview with Peter B. High. This experience molded, one could even say, scarred a whole generation of filmmakers such as Masaki Kobayashi, Seijun Suzuki and Kenji Misumi.

This early and rather bleak vision of the suffering and violence of humanity brought about a new view of the human experience, Japanese society and, as a side product, of cinema itself. Many would argue that Japanese cinema never saw itself the same again after the war and the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In 1947, after the war Okamoto entered Toho studios, where he served as assistant director to Senkichi Taniguchi on one of the earliest Akira Kurosawa scripts - *Snow Trail* (*Ginrei No Hate*). He began to direct in 1958 with the a number of melodramas such as *All About Marriage*, but these were not especially successful. He came to realize that his forte was in action films and he went on to direct three entries in Toho's successful *Underworld* series.

A big fan of John Ford, Okamoto quickly began to model his action films on American westerns. Creating a strange and unique amalgam of war films, Westerns and a Japanese/American cultural mix led to his many successes. (*Dokuritsugu Gurentai*) *Desperado Outpost* (1959) – a witty and satirical story of island-bound soldiers that transposed an "American cowboys and indians" type western to the Manchurian front of 1940's was a huge success.

This was followed by *Westward Desperado*, the plot structure of which is clearly modeled on a traditional American Western--a lone army troop on patrol is hounded by guerrilla



attacks by the warring enemy--except the situation is WWII, the Indians are the Chinese, John Wayne becomes Kayama Yuzo, and the cavalry is the Japanese Imperial Army !

Okamoto's films always seem to balance humour, satire and wit with violence and savagery, both *Desperado Outpost* and *Westward Desperado* have a strong if not biting humour and even the process of transplanting the American West has certain ironic twist. He did attempt a comedy (*Oh! Bomb* in 1964) but it was not well received so he returned to what he knew best and stayed there, at least until later in his career.

Within 1964 *Warring Clans* marked his focus on what are known as *Chanbara* films, the term literally means sword fighting and are usually period pieces which are marked by action and violence. Okamoto's films in this genre saw him becoming very well known in the west and marked a unique development of his own style which included an eye for rhythm, the careful use of sound and effect combined with careful editing to create flowing sword fighting and action sequences.

At the same time he broke with traditional Japanese cinematic tradition and was highly critical of bushido, the samurai lifestyle and Tokugawa society in general. This disaffection with the traditions that had led Japan into the war and created so much death and destruction also underlies his copious war films.

Some of his most popular films from this period *Samurai Assassin* (1965), *Sword of Doom* (1966), *Kill!* (1968), *Red Lion* (1969), all resonate with his dissatisfaction with tradition, the high cost of violence and the fact that when the sword (read gun, knife, bomb – whatever) is used, it is the poor and weak who suffer.

In 1970's many changes took place with in the film industry, the studio era came to an end and Okamoto began to work as an independent filmmaker. During this period he again tried his hand at other genres and made a bewildering range of films, ranging from *Human Bullett* (a war satire) to a science fiction film (*Blue Christmas*) and a crime comedy (*The Rainbow Kids*). Again, these were only marginally successful and it became obvious that his primary successes were war and Samurai titles.

One of the more popular during this period was *East Meets West* in 1995 which was billed as a Samurai Western. In this ultimate mixture of genres *Kamijo Kenkichi* is a Ronin from a clan opposed to Japan's opening to foreign lands.

On the surface his is on a routine diplomatic mission to the United States of America. However, he is actually on a secret mission is to assassinate various high-ranking U.S officials and foil the United States attempt at achieving global domination. Upon landing in San Francisco, he is given what seems to be a fairly straightforward task, which is to exchange a large amount of gold into currency.

Unfortunately, he is jumped by bandits who steal the lot ! After killing the bandits in a notably Samurai fashion, he goes after the gold. However, things gets more complicated very quickly , the Japanese government think that he has gone AWOL and taken the gold, so dispatch a Ninja to kill him, get back the gold and cover any tracks he has left about his true mission.

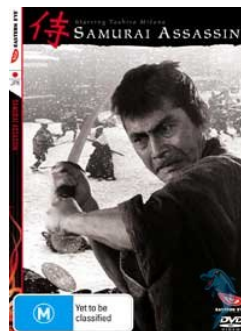
This was quite a major success and re-ignited interest in Okamoto in the West, in 2001 he made *Vengeance for Sale*, another Chanbara classic but by this time he was suffering from esophagus cancer, which finally took his life on February 19, 2005, he was 81. He died having made some 40 films including some which are considered classics in their genre.

This superb box set from Eastern Eye includes four of his classic Samurai/ Chanbara films. *Samurai Assassin*, *Red Lion*, *Kill!* and *Sword of Doom*.

This is a beautifully packaged set with high quality editions of each film with trailers and picture galleries.

Samurai Assassin

Samurai Assassin is based on the Sakurada Gate Incident of 1860. Inside Edo castle, a group of assassins from the house of Minto wait by Sakurada Gate to kill the lord of the House of Ii, "Ii Naosuke" also known as the "Demon of Hikone", a powerful man in the Tokugawa government, which has ruled Japan for 300 years.



They suspect a traitor in their midst, and their suspicions fall on Niiro, a wretched and undistinguished Ronin. Niiro lives by the river in abject poverty in a hut made of mud and sticks and works as a cheap bodyguard and bouncer for hire with some crime on the side to make ends meet.

Toshiro Mifune stars as Niiro, who has manipulated his way into the coup with the forlorn hope that it will gain him enough fame to earn a position in a great Samurai house. He has no real ideas and is simply using the coup as a means to satisfy his own personal ambition.

Moreover, Niiro has a secret, he is a bastard child of a very high ranking official, but Niiro believe his father will disclose his paternity if Niiro achieves samurai status. Of course, his family probably has a very different view of the matter.

Both Ii Naosuke and the assassins believe they are protecting Japan from outside influence, there are American ships in Japan's harbors and everyone is unsure of the future. In this time of great change, nobody can be trusted, everyone is making deals and Niiro is willing to do absolutely anything in order to become a successful samurai, but he does not realize that fate is against him.

Their actions will have far-reaching consequences; Ii Naosuke's murder marked the be-

ginning of the end for the Tokugawa Shogunate, and the end of the Samurai.

While *Sword of Doom* is considered Okamoto's most classic film, *Samurai Assassin* is considered the best known and most revered of all Samurai films in Western Cinema !

Red Lion

In this strange and quirky Samurai tale, *Red Lion*, Gonzo shows up in his home town after several years' absence wearing red headgear impersonating a leader of the imperial army.



The son of a peasant, Gonzo became a soldier to escape the stifling nature of his village. He returns to bring news that the tyranny of the local establishment has come to an end and to sing the praises of the Imperial Restoration. Of course, this message has as much to do with his personal desire to bring down his oppressors as any political significance. Strangely, the peasants (used to their way of life) and the local Samurai do not welcome the message of their "liberation". All sorts of arguments, fights and conflicts arise, all calling into question Gonzo's military prowess and connection to the imperial army and resurrecting old scores from the past.

While this may seem like a film which is primarily locked within a specific historical period i.e. the Meiji restoration, it can just as much be seen as a revolt of the poor against the rich. This motif is found in many cultures ranging from the Robin Hood figure so loved in English cinema to our own Ned Kelly and the myth of the bushranger. The whole model of the warrior who works on the side of the poor stealing from the rich is embodied in this strange yet intriguing epic.

Kill!!

In this dark Samurai comedy it is Joshu Province, March 1833 and a pair of down-on-their-luck and starving swordsmen (Hanjiro and Ayuzawa) arrive in a dusty, dirty and half deserted town.



Two months before the township was ravaged by a gang of Yakuza and is hence in the middle of a violent clan dispute.

The pair are not what they seem, Hanjiro was once a farmer but dreams of being a noble samurai. Genta is a former samurai haunted by the violence of his past; both prefer living anonymously, taking jobs whenever offered and siding with whoever wins.

They team up with a group of seven strong but somewhat dim samurai who murder a vassal of the Shogun on behalf of a local boss named Chamberlain Ayuzawa. But soon the men realize Ayuzawa is a danger to both of their lives, they side with the rebels who are under siege at a remote mountain cabin.

This is based on the novel as Akira Kurosawa's *Sanjuro*, however *Kill!!* interprets the source differently creating a darkly funny farce packed with wit, even some of the more violent scenes seem to brim with comedic elements. Okamoto mixes Westerns, comedy and traditional Samurai/Chanbara forms into a unique amusing film.

Sword of Doom

In 1913 the serial novel *Great Bodhisattva Pass* began serialization, the Author Kaizan Nakazato (1885-1944) would add new chapters at intervals for the rest of his life, always leaving it open-ended and creating violent and bizarre story lines.



He never wrote a final chapter but always left the psychopathic and somewhat demented hero in danger of torture and death, the cliff-hanger leading into the next tale of madness and mayhem.

The *Sword of Doom* is a film which embodies some of the greatest aspects of this tale.

As the story opens, it's Spring 1860, Japan. An old man and his granddaughter are struggling towards Edo. When they stop to rest at a shrine, the man privately prays for death so that he may relieve the girl Omatsu of the burden of looking after him.



A lone swordsman Ryunosuke watches and listens from a distance, his quietly ponders, the scene is set. He approaches and kills the old man with a single stroke of his sword, granting his wish.

There is no real meaning to the killing, Ryunosuke is certainly in no threat and certainly not illustrating any compassion. Ryunosuke is not obviously not granting the man's wish, it is simply an excuse for a perfect cold killing. A chance to test his sword and his skill.

It is a superbly framed, haunting sequence that sets the brutal and violent tone of Sword of Doom, a tone that accelerates throughout the film.

The next scene continues exploring the theme of the amoral Ryunosuke, the Samurai as psychopath. The wife of the challenger of his next exhibition match, comes to plead for her husband's life.

Not only does Ryunosuke demand she surrender herself to him as payment, he then proceeds to kill her husband anyway with a single breathtakingly brutal sword stroke.

As the film continues we begin to see the world through Ryunosuke's eye, his mind is one with the metal, he focuses on his skill and human life is disposable.

He treats men as objects to be battled against and women as objects of desire to be taken and used as he so requires.

This is a dark and gruesome film, Okamoto mixes superb choreography and violent swordplay with exquisitely beautiful images of the landscape. It is an evocative and powerful film filled with perfectly framed scenes and set pieces.

It is a strange exploration of opposites, light and dark, beauty and violence, love and death.

Ryunosuke is a damaged man, he is a character than on one level seems demented, psychopathic, even perhaps pathological, yet at the same time he seems to be a man that is haunted by the changes in his society and perhaps represents the madness of the world around him.

He seems to have some sort of conscience, which is hinted at during certain sequences of the film and yet lives beyond it.

Yes, he is a amoral Ronin, but he seems to have a darkness within him that suggests so much more.

The Sword of Doom is considered one of Okamoto's most classic films, haunting, violent, dark and..... beautiful.

**Kihachi Okamoto
Collection
4 DVD Box Set
Eastern Eye
Entertainment
Madman Entertainment
www.madman.com.au**

Includes:

Kill !
Sword of Doom
Red Lion
Samurai Assassin

In a very nice box set.
Each DVD is presented in a full-size DVD case.

Extras include:

Trailers
Image galleries.

All four are also available as individual titles from Eastern Eye/Madman Entertainment as well.

Web: <http://www.madman.com.au>



SHAW BROTHERS EXPLOITATIONS FROM THE FAR EAST



The Shaw Brothers started making movies in China before WWII. In Shanghai, Runme Shaw and his brothers owned a film company known as Unique Film Productions (aka Tian Yi Film Co). With the hope of expanding their market, the Shaw Brothers considered moving to Indochina but were denied permission to land and hence went to Singapore, which became the major base for them from then on.

In many ways the Shaw Brothers were the Hollywood of the East, producing thousands of films of a vast variety of genres and of varying quality. Shaw Brothers is still the largest movie production company of Hong Kong and it really was the forerunner of all Hong Kong Cinema.

In the west, Shaw Brothers primarily became known for martial arts and Kung Fu films, but they actually produced a bewildering number of films in a wide variety of genres.

In this unusual collection of Shaw Brothers films we enter the world of eastern exploitation films. Films which combine the martial arts, flying styles, bright colours and Asian sensibilities with sexuality, perverse themes, monsters and horror.

This is a unique collection of films it that it really combines many of the themes found in western exploitation and horror films but with a distinctly eastern presentation. These films are marked by visually stunning costumes, sets and designs, and feature amazing martial arts choreography and swordplay.

This collection includes:

The Mighty Peking Man
Human Lanterns
Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan
An Amorous Woman of Tang Dynasty
The Golden Lotus



Human Lanterns

Human Lanterns is a beautiful yet dark mixture of Asian sensibility and horror. It has the look of a classic martial arts film and is filled with action, colour and mood, yet is also has a strong horror element by having it's primary motif as a character whose means of revenge is making lanterns of human skin.

Chun Fang has been defeated in battle and beats a scar to prove it. Yet he is vengeful and bears a grudge, a long grudge. It is seven years later and now as a craftsman, his plan begins to take effect. He sets two warring noblemen (Lau Wing and Chen Kuan-tai) against each other by abducting their loved ones and peeling their skin, which he uses to create a series of prize-winning lanterns.

This mixture of gothic madman taking revenge and Kung Fu is really quite impressive and the horror elements while subtle are quite powerful. The carefully choreographed fight scenes are impressive and scenery and imagery superb.

It is well filmed and the widescreen presentation (Shaw Screen) certainly looks great on a large TV screen. It has been very well restored and is pretty close to a faultless reproduction.

The Mighty Peking Man

The Mighty Peking Man is the ultimate Asian knock-off, Shaw Brothers were convinced that an "Asian" version of King Kong would do wonders at the box office and so created one of the most ridiculously funny cult films you can imagine. It is a cross between Jane of the Jungle and King Kong.

It is hard to summarize the number of "jungle events" that they have packed into this 86 minute film.



After the opening scene which seems to use all manner of models and the Mighty Peking "Man in a Suit" the film moves into total over-drive. It is as though they decided that it would make the film more likely to succeed if they included every possible jungle disaster they could think of. Stampeded Elephants, Quicksand, attacking leopards and tigers, members of the team falling off clip faces, all occur within a short space of time.

The scene where one of the team wrestles a tiger is astounding as we regularly seem to cut between a real tiger and a stuffed one. The blatantly bad special effects just make this film even better, it is just so utterly bad, it is good, really good !

Then we meet Jane of the Jungle, actually called Ah Wei. She spends most of the film in a small, skimpy jungle outfit which only just covers her right nipple. She can run, jump, hide, even get slapped around and her outfit seems to stay in place – superglue ?? I am not sure.

She saves our hero, Johnny, whom the team have abandoned in the jungle during the dead of night as they no longer believe he can deliver the giant ape. Johnny and Ah Wei then experience a strange 1970's love romp with disco music, strange dancing through the forest and some of the most silly moments in cinema – i.e. we see Ah Wei dancing romantically with Jonny with a leopard wrapped around her head!!! There are lots of slow mos, dancing, jungle animals being swung around like toys and more.

After a period of bliss, punctuated by a snake bite melodrama, where Ah Wei is saved because the giant ape shows Jonny what herbal remedy to use, Johnny somehow convinces her and her friend Ah Wang (the giant ape !!!), to accompany him into the city and onto Hong Kong. They want into a major Indian city and havoc ensues, of course !

He meets up again with the team who left him behind, but all seems forgiven, not even a harsh word (they left him to die in the jungle



for gods sake, but somehow this escapes the plot) and they all decide to take a barge with the giant ape to Hong Kong !

Along the way, they hit a storm, Ah Wang the giant ape, breaks loose so he can push them off a rock which is about to destroy the boat and they arrive in Hong Kong ready for the next adventure,

This magnificently B grade spectacular has so many holes in the plot it is amazing it can float, however, be that as it may, it is so ridiculous that it succeeds where so many attempts at cult films fail. I suppose it is because it is so damn serious. It was made as a "real" King Kong rip off and hence the more serious it tries to be the more hysterical it becomes.

The music is totally inappropriate and over the top, the acting is outrageous and the special effects seem to range from stock footage to stuffed toys, Tonka trucks and miniatures to terrible models.

Each scene seems to want to top the last and the finale when they fill the water tanks on the top of the building with petrol and blow Ah Wang up, setting him on fire with the finale being that he plummets to earth like some sort of animal fireball is just too much.

Once again the film has been faultlessly restored (Why ? Why? You just may ask), it is so clear it is scary, every special effects faux pa is now brilliantly reproduced with such clarity that it makes this a truly spectacular cult film classic!

This is cult cinema at its very best, you have to see it to believe it !!

The Golden Lotus

The Golden Lotus is a very different Shaw Brothers film. It includes no kung fu or sword-play and rather than focusing on action, murder and mayhem is primarily a film about desire and corruption with a strong emphasis on sexuality and eroticism.



The Golden Lotus is an adaptation of the well-known Chinese novel Jin Ping Mei, it is believed it was written in the late Ming Dynasty period.

It describes the exploits of Ximen Qing (Yueng Kwan), a virile young man about town whose wealth and position give him access to various wives and consorts. He is not a personal safely refused his objects of desire.

The story opens with an act of intrigue. Ximen Qing takes a fancy to Pan Jinlian (Hu Chin), who is beautiful yet married. Her husband Wu Dalang (Chiang Nan) is a pancake seller who is extremely short, even dwarflike and rather ugly; he is regularly abused and teased by those who do business with him. Ximen desires Pan and in a conspiracy with her neighbor, seduces her and secretly kills her husband.

It seems Ximen has got away with his crime and he marries Pan, while the whole township suspect what he had done nobody will confront him due to his wealth and power. However, there is a hitch, a very young Jackie Chan, who plays a local fruit seller, knows what Ximen has done.

After marriage, Pan finds herself out of her depth.

Rather than having a devoted husband in a household where she is the centre of his affection, she finds herself in a world of many wives and mistresses, all being mistreated and used by a man whose sole interest is himself. Ximen becomes more and more cruel and slowly but surely is driven to extremes to satisfy his lust for sex, wealth and power.

Sadly, Pan also finds herself changing as she needs to battle for her very survival.

This is a highly erotic film, filled with sex, intrigue, murder and corruption. It is a fascinating tale which explores new territory within the Shaw Brothers canon.



It includes an honest depiction of the manipulation and use of sex as a form of power and offers an impressive interpretation of a classic Chinese tale of passion, power and desire.

Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan

Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan shocked audiences when it was released in 1972 and is considered one of the Shaw Brothers most infamous films.

The story centres around a lesbian brothel (Chun-i) keeper who kidnaps young women to staff her growing establishment. She kidnaps Ai Nu, a rebellious and feisty young girl. While Ai Nu thinks she can outsmart Chun-i, she soon finds out that Chun-i is also an expert kung fu expert and not above using any means to make her girls get the job done.

Ai Nu is broken in through a series of fairly confronting scenes by older and obviously violent men, four wealthy and important officials are the most significant.

These scenes are filmed in such a way that they linger in the mind long after they are seen. Of course this sets the stage for Ai Nu's desire for revenge on those who have degraded her.

She makes an alliance with Chief Ji, who is trying to investigate a murder but is finding that his investigation is being blocked by corruption.

The climax of the tale is how Ai Nu takes revenge on the four officials and she certainly does so in a most brutal fashion. This is an unusual mixture of genres, on one level it is a rape-revenge film with the portrayals of her abuse shown in a powerful way and her revenge even more brutal.

Yet at the same time there is also a crime-detective tale tucked in there as well, kung fu



and lots of the unique Shaw touches when it comes to costumes, sets, music and cinematography.

This is another unusual Shaw Brother classic which stands out from their usual fare and hence has a pride of place in this eastern exploitation series.

An Amorous Woman of Tang Dynasty

An Amorous Woman of Tang Dynasty is another erotic Shaw classic which breaks the mould. The central character Yu (Patricia Ha Man-jik) is an independent (even liberated) woman in a time where women were either expected to be wives, courtesans or concubines. She uses a sojourn in a Taoist monastery to make her escape from the constraints of the “expected life” and teams up with a wandering swordsman Tsui Po-Ho (Alex Man Chi-leung).

When Tsui leaves, Yu goes back to the monastery with Lu Chiao (Lin Kai-Lin), but is expelled for after a hot lesbian encounter. To survive they decide to set up business alongside the many brothels in the township and become famous for their parties. Along the way they have many and varied erotic encounters.

There is also some nifty swordplay and action scenes including an especially impressive action sequence when bandits try to attack their brothel and Tsui and his sidekick Auyang (Chang Kuo-chu) arrive just in time to save it.

This is a strange tale of a Taoist priestess who in following freedom has to deal with the consequences of her decisions and many of these become more and more difficult to justify.

While beautifully filmed, it is a strangely edited film and seems to move between sex and violence without a lot of explanation. Many of the scenes move quickly from one image to another and it is very easy to get lost along

the way. In many ways this is the weakest of the eastern exploitation films from the Shaw Brothers, while it is scrumptious to look at, filled with colour and imagery, its lack of real plot and direction makes it harder going than the others in this collection.

This is not to say it isn't an enjoyable film, simply experience it as it is and don't expect an especially meaningful storyline !



Exploitations from the Far East Shaw Classics

Siren Visual
R4 DVD
Box Set

Web: <http://www.sirenvisual.com.au>

This is a lovely box set offering superbly restored editions of these films, the vibrant colours of the costumes, sets and designs cannot be faulted and the music and soundtracks are perfectly clear.

This collection includes:

The Mighty Peking Man
Human Lanterns
Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan
An Amorous Woman of Tang Dynasty
The Golden Lotus

All 5 DVDs are included in their own cases and come with extras.

This is a real collector's delight.

The DVDs from this collection are also available as individual titles as are a wide range of other Shaw Brother titles.

WALERIAN BOROWCZYK AND "LA BETE" (THE BEAST)

Walerian Borowczyk was born in 1923 in Kwilcz, Poland. He trained as a painter and lithographer, even winning Poland's National Prize in 1953. His entry into the film industry was by movie poster design and then short animated films. These animated shorts were surrealist in orientation and quite unusual by the standards of the period including not only a great sense of wit and dark humour but solid doses of eroticism and at times, quite a level of violence. One of the better known from this period (made in 1967) was *Théâtre de M. et Mme. Kabal*. It focuses on the life of a married couple who are clearly having problems and given to constant fights and bickering, however, Borowczyk subverts the subjects by replacing the head of Madame Kabal with a range of obscure objects including bombs and so forth. He even breaks the continuity of the film by showing himself entering into the film and being nearly seduced by Madame Kabal in her husband's absence. This surrealist form, experimental use of animation and deliberate subversion of the traditional forms of cinema mark all of his later works.

At the same time Borowczyk was not just a humourous filmmaker, like many surrealists he was shocked and disgusted by the world around him and the hypocrisy of the prevailing society and hence used film as a means to lampoon its pretensions. In *Les Jeux des Anges* (1964), for example, he introduces us to a vision of hell on earth which focuses on a macabre trip to a prison camp where angels of death gun down and slice up corpses, all accompanied by a soundtrack of ecclesiastical music.

In 1968 Borowczyk moved into life action film with *Goto, the Island of Love*. The story of Goto is a dark reflection on humanity to say the least. The plot is bizarre and surreal. The Island of Goto was cut off from the rest of the world by a storm in the late 1800s. In isolation, the island has developed into its own culture and society. In the schools, the children are taught nothing but the history of Goto and their complete existence is conditioned by the dictator of the Island. (Their isolation is described as being caused by the "The Great Catastrophe of 1887"). The current ruler is



Governor Goto III an eccentric, even insane, dictator who controls all aspects of life, including the rejection of all modern technology, only allowing names beginning with "G," and a range of other seemingly meaningless rules which are enforced with strict and violent discipline. This Discipline is maintained by one on one combat, and all crimes are equally punishable.

From one of these battles escapes Grozo, a petty criminal by all accounts, who is saved by the wife of the island's ruler, but she has ulterior motives, she wishes to escape the Island and its dictator, her husband. She installs Grozo as the dog catcher of the island, but he owes her. As she works of manipulate those around her, she conducts an affair with a handsome riding instructor, and the two plan to escape from the island by boat. Nevertheless, their plans are to be disrupted by Grozo's desire for power and his lust for Glossia and in the end she must submit to Grozo who not only becomes the new Goto but takes her as his prize.

The film is a bleak portrayal of sex and power and is a powerful first film from Borowczyk which won much acclaim.



In his next film, the 1971 classic *Blanche*, he explores the story of a nobleman who shuts his wife up in a castle tower; again it is a powerfully evocative film and his ability to create the look and feel of the 13th century is remarkable. These first two films illustrated his ability to create incredible environments with texture and colour which are not only evocative but emotion filled. In these films it becomes clear that the settings, environment, even furniture are as much part of the story as the acting and the plot. The look of his film, his own unique editing style and his emphasis on the environment and texture of his films became his trademarks.

While his early films were well received and the excesses of his animations seen as mere eccentricity, his exploration of sexuality in its diverse presentations shocked many viewers, though they still flocked to watch them! It began with the 1974 issue of *Immortal Tales*. *Immortal tales* was comprised of four short films which explore sexuality and deviation using various historical periods as a backdrop. They are beautifully presented but have what could be considered fairly shocking content presented in a frank and matter of fact manner.

Subjects like fellatio, masturbation, incest, pain and pleasure (BDSM) and sex are death are given historical settings and portrayed in amazing tableaux's comprising perfectly created set pieces using a wide range of items which all take on special significance, ranging from a wooden doll to a cucumber, erotic art to religious figures. His portrayal of the human condition is strongly Freudian, suppressed sexuality governed by religion and ritual, explodes as a force which cannot be controlled and manifests in a myriad of forms, some more benign than others.

This was followed in 1975 by *La Bête* (The Beast), which was seen by Borowczyk as the fifth segment of the *Immortal Tales* and is certainly his most controversial film. It is an amazingly bizarre fairy tale, but in the original sense of the term. Today we see fairy tales as nice little stories to tell our children, harmless fantasies of elves, fairies and distant lands. However, they were not always so benign. For example, in 1845 *Struwwelpeter* was a hugely popular German children's book by Heinrich Hoffmann. It comprised ten illustrated and rhymed stories.

Each had a clear message that demonstrated the disastrous consequences of bad behavior in a highly extreme and in many cases violent way. It was used by parents to threaten their children



with the end that befalls those who do not do what they are told. These are not nice tales, thumbs are sheared off, eyes fall out of sockets, faces are pecked to death and bodies waste to nothing! Other tales of the Medieval period explored sexuality and violent in a variety of mythic forms, in many ways *The Beast* mixes together these genres and creates a sexually charged adult fairy tale.

In this quite beautiful yet shocking story, the Marquis de l'Esperance to safeguard his estate and family lineage arranges a marriage between his son, Mathurin, and an English heiress, Lucy Broadhurst. Whilst the Marquis is putting pressure, unsuccessfully, on the Duc De Ballo, to get his brother the cardinal to attend the wedding mass, Lucy arrives with her aunt. Meanwhile, a priest is seeing to Mathurin's baptism. The family is not what it seems, the priest has an unhealthy interest in young boys, the family and indeed Lucy have strange obsessions including one about horses having sex. The whole film explores the madness and dysfunction of a suppressed sexually out of touch family with all manner of hidden secrets, blackmail, strange liaisons and much besides.

As the story continues and they wait for the cardinal, Lucy discovers the story of a young woman who was raped by a wild beast, in the grounds of the château, 200 years ago and this leads to the film's most startling sequence. An extended flashback which offers an adult retelling of the Beauty and the Beast myth. In this version, the beast, a man in a rather obvious bear costume chases a beautiful young maiden naked except for a corset through the forest before confronting her with a large phallus of monstrous proportions and having his way with her in various positions. This sequence is extremely explicit and will certainly confront those not ready for it.

On many levels it has a humorous and amusing; on the other hand you certainly have to have a



certain dark sense of humour, this is a pretty over the top cinematic experience, not one matched in any other film, surrealist or serious. The fact that the bear is obviously a man in a suite has obvious psychological meaning (man is just another animal) and the and the inherent violence underneath is humour is unsettling to say the least.

At the same time this is a beautifully produced surreal story which has much in common I am sure with true Medieval stories and tales which would have abounded in the countryside, it explores themes of family dysfunction, sexual desire, love and death in a way which is quite unique.

This edition from Umbrella Entertainment is in a word, delectable!! It is a directors cut, beautifully clear with a clarity of sound which is astounding, considering this is an older cult film; it is amazing to see such a superb edition available. The colours are breathtaking and it really shows off the cinematographic skills for which Borowczyk was so well regarded. In many ways this makes the film even more bizarre, it is so perverse yet so beautifully and skillfully produced. It is different from anything that most viewers will ever see anywhere else.

It comes in a two DVD set, the second disc includes a truly comprehensive documentary The Making of la Bete (105 minutes) and an interviews, biography and gallery.

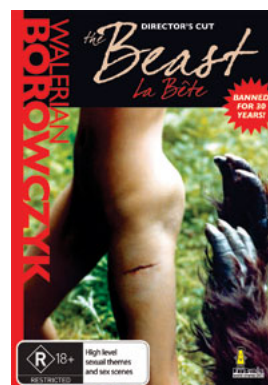
Borowczyk continued to make unusual films such as Docteur Jekyll et les Femmes in 1981 and Emmanuelle 5, in 1987, but never reached the levels of surrealism he achieved with La Bete.

In 1989 he made his last feature Love Rites, which Adapted from a short story by André

Pieyre de Mandiargues, tells the tale of a French fashion designer Hugo Arnold who meets a young and beautiful woman. He desires her and spends the day with her, after some time he learns that she is a prostitute and after much talking and stalling, they go back to her place.

This may sound boring but it isn't, Borowczyk slowly builds and builds the sexual tension, the will she or won't she until the final half of the film where after sex, she turns into a creature of monstrous proportions with huge claws and attacks and emasculates the young designer. Another strange and amazing film from Borowczyk exploring sex and death.

Walerian Borowczyk continued his career in the late '90s with minor work in television and died of heart failure on February 2, 2006.



La Bête (The Beast)
Walerian Borowczyk
Australian Release
Directors Cut
2 DVD Set
Umbrella Entertainment

Special Features:

Making of La Bête
 105min
 Interview with Walerian Borowczyk
 Walerian Borowczyk Biography
 Stills Gallery

Love Rites and Goto

At present Love Rites and Goto: Island of Love are not distributed in Australia. Both are available in US editions from Cult Epics. Cult Epics has also scheduled a future release of the Animated Films of Walerian Borowczyk which should be quite astounding to see.

H.P LOVECRAFT DVD SERIES

LURKER FILMS

The H.P Lovecraft Series

Volumes 1-4

Volume 1: Cool Air

Volume 2: Cthulhu Rising

Volume 3: Out of Mind

Volume 4: Pickman's Model

Lurker Films

Web: <http://www.lurkerfilms.com>

Distribution: Microcinema

Web: <http://www.microcinema.com>

H.P Lovecraft was an enigmatic pulp horror writer who never really achieved fame during this lifetime. However, after his death his strange fiction triggered a renaissance in dark fantasy. When the great cultural revolution of the 1960's dawned and Colin Wilson heralded Lovecraft as the cult visionary of alienation in his work "The Outsider" H.P Lovecraft's stories became an instant success. Concepts from his books became part of our horror culture, from film to music and of course, various re-visionings in fiction and literature. Indeed, some strange individuals even claimed the Elder Gods were real and Cthulhu occultism was all the rage, something which would have made Lovecraft turn in his grave considering he was an atheist and rationalist.

Over the years many films have been made of his various works. Lovecraft himself was wary of film and did not believe any of his works could be adapted to the screen. Roger Corman produced a range of B Grade adap-



tations of Lovecraft tales and of course who can forget Dean Stockwell in the flawed but enjoyable Seventies romp The Dunwich Horror. Stuart Gordon, of course, offered us the Re-Animator series as well as From Beyond and Dagon, all fairly impressive adaptations of Lovecraft into the modern, if not gore filled, world of big budget horror.

At the same time the world of independent film has not ignored Lovecraft either and I tend to think that due to the unique nature of Lovecraft's vision, creativity is what makes good films within this genre not necessarily huge budgets.

Lurker Films have released a series of volumes of H.P. Lovecraft anthologies on DVD. These are distributed by Microcinema and represent a grand exploration of the Lovecraft mythos expressed in a myriad of different forms.

Each of the DVDs includes a major adaptation of a Lovecraft tale and a range of short films and other content. These are impressive products offering a nice selection of films of varying quality and in various styles and genres.

Each of the DVDs includes a major adaptation of a Lovecraft tale and a range of short films and other content. These are impressive products offering a nice selection of films of varying quality and in various styles and genres.



Volume 1: Cool Air

Cool Air is the major film on Volume One and is an impressive start to the series. Filmed in black and white, it embodies a unique style which really communicates the vision of this unique tale.



Randolph Carter moves into a decayed boarding house in the summer of 1925. Under the stress of hard work Carter suffers a heart attack and is revived by a rather strange doctor. Carter soon realizes there are many unusual things about Dr. Munoz - he never leaves his apartment and the room is kept at the coldest temperature possible.

As the story unfolds Carter uncovers the truth about the doctor and learns along the way the significance of the human will.

This film won the 1999 Lovecraft Festival, and the award is very well deserved. While this may be a low budget independent film, the mood created is melancholic and moving, it is well paced, very well acted and surprisingly well filmed.

The other short films are of varied quality, An Imperfect Solution, interprets part of Lovecraft's serialized horror adventure Herbert West: Re-Animator and there is also Nyarlathotep, a strange tale about a mummy, based on a dark moody prose poem of the same name by Lovecraft, who claimed he heard it in a dream. The Hound involves a pair of grave robbers who come to a rather gruesome end.

There is also The Hapless Antiquarian which is a nice short produced in the format of a 1920's silent film, sepia tint and all.

Extras include and interviews with the cast and crew of Cool Air and an interview with scholar S.T. Joshi.

Volume 2: Dreams of Cthulhu -The Rough Magik Initiative

The major release on Volume two is Dreams of Cthulhu (Rough Magik), it was originally made as a pilot for the BBC and is hence of very high quality.

The cult of the Sleeping God is on the rise. A young mother sacrifices her two children to an idol of the "Sleeping God". It is soon discovered that the woman is a "dreamer", and that she has fallen under the spell of the "Sleeping God", she is quickly secreted away to an isolated location.



Mr. Moon (Paul Darrow) is called in to investigate what has occurred and decides to take in for questioning psychiatrist Kenneth Reese Warren. It seems Warren is an ex member of the "Night Scholars" - a British Intelligence organization dedicated to monitoring the Sleeping God phenomenon.

Now, it seems, the Sleeping God is back and the Night Scholars is once again moved into action.

This is very impressive exploration of the Cthulhu mythos. It is superior production with credible acting, excellent locations and some great twists and turns. It is quite a complex story and has a lot going for it. In addition, it is set within the world of Delta Green, based on a role playing game developed by Chaosium and this helps bring the film to a wider audience.

There are two shorts by Bob Fugger which are quite good quality. The Terrible Old Man short is a modern version of Lovecraft's tale and offers a nice updated take, while in From Beyond we have a faithful rendition of the tale which is extremely effective.

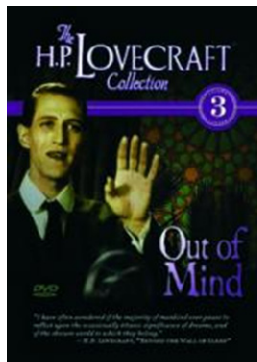
Sure it doesn't have the whizz bang factor of Stuart Gordon's version, but it is a lot closer in spirit to the original tale and certainly an excellent adaptation.

There is also Experiment 17 and 18 directed by Christian Matzke, a commentary on Rough Magik.

It also includes bonus interviews including a continuation of the interview with Lovecraft Scholar S.T. Joshi.

Volume 3: Out of Mind

This is a very impressive offering. Made by Bravo! Canada, this film starring Christopher Heyerdahl as Lovecraft offers an informed and entertaining look at his life and work, it is the very first time it has been available on DVD.



However, this is not a documentary; it actually enters into Lovecraft's inner world of dreams and nightmares, exploring it within a fictional tale. The film has lots on "in jokes" for those who know their Lovecraft but is also respectful as well as informative and entertaining.

An added bonus is two commentary tracks on the film by Director Raymond Saint-Jean, Christopher Heyerdahl, and cinematographer Serge Ladouceur.

The Music of Erich Zann is also quite a masterful short film and unique in the Lovecraft canon in that music plays a major part. Charles Dexter Ward takes a room in a boarding house and every night he hears strange but mesmerizing music coming from the room upstairs. One evening he meets the old man who is responsible for the hypnotic violin music and asks if he can sit in on a practice session. Reluctantly the mute musician agrees, and the two become friends. However, of course, there is a strange secret to why he only plays at night. This is a striking and impressive tale with some great music to boot !

The outsider is a great short with a pretty awesome creature, considering the budget the achievement with special effects on this one is impressive.

Again, there are more interviews including the continuing discussion with Lovecraft Scholar S.T. Joshi.

Volume 4: Pickman's Model

Volume 4 is focused on the classic Lovecraft tale Pickman's model offering various adaptations and interpretations.

Chilean Gothic is a very professional Lovecraft adaptation; it won the Festival Internacional de Cine de Valdivia best script award.

Based on a screenplay by Gilberto Villarroel, it was originally shot on 16mm then edited on Betacam SP with English subtitles and was made for broadcast on TV in Chile.

Gabriel Martinez is a journalist obsessed with finding the truth about the death of a colleague and friend Aníbal who was brutally murdered while researching a piece on American painter Richard Upton Pickman. Pickman's paintings are disturbing portrayals of monsters and creatures that originate within myth and folklore.

Martinez finds out what he can about Pickman and through an art professor and his old landlord locates him in Santiago. Martinez decides to visit the painter and when he arrives, his mind begins to unravel as he discovers the terrible truth about Pickman and his art...

This is quite a textured and layered piece of cinema, it works on many different levels and through the use of hints, partially shown art and ciphers, the imagination of the viewer makes up the rest and this makes it even more effective work.

Other versions include a very dark and moody interpretation of the myth from Italy and a somewhat less than successful black and white version of the tale. Other films include a rather nice CGI animation In the Vault about a gravedigger and interviews with authors Ramsey Campbell and Robert B. Price about Lovecraft and his influence on their work.

This Lovecraft Series is really quite an astounding achievement. Each volume offers innovative adaptations of H.P Lovecraft into the modern cultural milieu; we not only get a major release on each but lots of short films, interviews and extras. These DVDs really are goldmines of horror and suspense and a joy to experience. Each one also comes with a nice 8 page informative booklet.

It is always a joy to see what will come next and I cannot wait to see the next one – Volume 5: Strange Aeons.



DEATH NOTE

LIVE ACTION TRILOGY

The Death Note Live Action Films

Death Note I and II

L Change the World

Madman Entertainment

Web: <http://www.madman.com.au>

R4 DVD

L Change the World is the follow up to Death Note I and II, both of which achieved phenomenal success around the world. Death Note in itself has caused quite a pop cultural frenzy with an animated series, Death Note figures and collectables and of course, three live action films. There are lots of sites dedicated to the series and it has become a real cult favourite.

Death Note I and II focused around Light Yagami, a college student who while studying law becomes disenchanted with the lack of justice he sees around him. In his disillusionment he finds a book simply called "Death Note." Inside this strange book is a list of rules and regulations on how to cause people to die unnaturally. This book is a vehicle by which the Shinigami (God of Death) intervene in the human world.

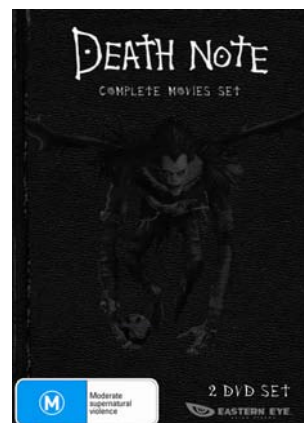
It seems this book can not only cause heart attacks, but bring about various forms of death and even manipulate people's behaviour prior to death and time and place of death itself. As he comes to comprehend the ramifications of the power he holds in his hands, Yagami decides he's going to make the world a better place by eliminating those people who do harm to others i.e. criminals. However, as he begins to kill, taking the name Kira, he becomes a cult hero and the police and authorities are on his tail. As Kira becomes better known throughout the media and internet Yagami becomes seduced by the

praise he is now receiving and it is not long before he is killing those who stand in his way just as fast as those he believes to be criminals.

As the "cat and mouse" game continues, Yagami becomes more and more corrupted by the power he possesses, a special team (including his father) are investigating Kira and hot on his trail. The emphasis in the first film is on the battle between Kira and L, a detective trying to catch him. Both are young, alienated and well, a little strange. The use of the Gods of Death are superb and their anime look intruding into a live action film gives it amazing fantasy feel.

The film climaxes when a second God of death drops a further death notebook and things become more complicated.

The sequel explores the cat and mouse game between Kira (Light Yagami) and L, a detective trying to catch the killer. Now with a second death book things become more complicated, as the second killer is captured new tricks must be considered to avoid being caught. This film is a quite a lot longer (over 2 hours) and explores a fascinatingly complex tale of power and betrayal, mixing together a supernatural thriller and a solid detective drama.





We get a lot more detail about the Gods of Death who are tied to the Death Note books and indeed the film has a far darker view of humanity, even the Gods of the Death note how heartless and vicious humans become when they gain power !!!

Both of these films really focus on the nature of power and have a strong presence of the various “death gods”, the third follow up film, while impressive, has a very different feel. It focuses on L and his battle against bio-terrorism. But nothing is quite as it seems the terrorists have been infiltrated by someone who is simply intent on using their organization and the virus they possess to make money and hence the battle between idealism and greed becomes a major theme. K, an operative of the L organisation, is also a major character, she has become seduced by the extreme ecological method and believes that most of humanity must die to save the planet.

This third film explores the dangers of misplaced idealism and how it can lead to terrorism. While it focuses on L and his cat and mouse game against the terrorists the Death Note phenomenon is really left behind. There is only one appearance by one of the Shinigami and the book itself places little to no significance, except, that as a background motif. It is used to kill Warati and L puts his own name in it so he can guarantee his lifespan to defeat the terrorists and then the story continues pretty well without any of the motifs of the earlier films.

While L Change the World is an impressive action flick and the violence and action has certainly increased a lot over the first two films, it lacks the cerebral content of Death Note I and II. In many ways it has been dumbed down and reduced to a simple detective and action drama using the Death Note characters and story as a background.

L Change the world is not a total disappointment, it shows a lot more of the humanity of L and explores his exploration of life in prepara-



tion for his impending death. Indeed, it could have been called the last 23 days of L ! In the earlier films L was more like an intellectual super hero, detached from life and using technology to solve crime – a sort of supergeek if you like. In this film he begins to explore his humanity as the date of his death comes nears, does he actually die ? We do not know – perhaps there is room for another film !

The storyline is interesting and even at two hours it certainly keeps your attention. It can be enjoyed as a standalone film, but if you have seen Death Note I and II the nuances and references do give it a little more depth.

Even if we view L Change the World primarily it as a detective type action film, it is still a highly successful one. There is lots of character development and it is quirky and strange enough to make it vastly superior to the thrash Hollywood produces under the name of action or detective films !

It is just a shame that it was no further exploration of the Death Note universe that was created in films I and II.

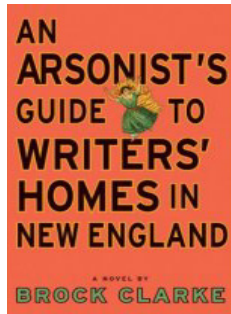
Death Note I and II are available as a combined pack from Madman Entertainment.

L Change the World is a single DVD live action film. There are also a wide selection of Anime Death note DVDs, collector figures, bookends, PVC toys and related products all at Madman Entertainment.

BOOK REVIEWS

An Arsonist's Guide to Houses in New England: A Novel
Brock Clarke
Text Publishing 2007

Reviewer: Bob Estreich.



I, Sam Pulsifer, would like you to know that I take full responsibility for burning down the home of Emily Dickinson. However, I cannot take credit for the other literary blazes that were inspired by mine. At least, I don't think I can."

Sam Pulsifer is a self-described bumbler – he bumbles unemotionally through his life, which he inadvertently manages to make a mess of. In his youth he accidentally set fire to a famous writer's historic house, which had two people inside at the time. Noone believed he could have done it accidentally, so he served time in jail for it. Now he is out, and happily married and settled down. His past, naturally, catches up with him.

There are other people who would like Sam to return to his old ways. New England has many famous writers' houses, and they start to catch fire. Sam, of course, is believed to be the culprit. As he bumbles his way through the story he finds that there are many reasons people would want him to burn down writers' houses, not least that they feel inferior to the writers' characters. But if it's not Sam burning down the houses, who is?

The book is a story about the power of stories. It is hard to feel much sympathy for Sam, as he simply bumbles along to a surprising conclusion, but the reader is carried along with him as much by curiosity as sympathy.

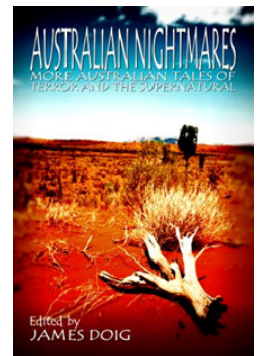
We learn more about each of the characters as the story progresses, and it's not always pleasant.

Even so, it is hard to dislike any character, even the (slightly) evil son of the couple who burnt to death in the first fire. Many of them seem to be bumbling along their own storyline as well, in a form of sly humour that keeps popping up throughout the book.

Although reviewers have rated it as wildly funny, I can't put it as strongly as this. It's not gag-a-minute stuff. The humour is there, but it's subtle and builds up to an overall impression. Nevertheless it carries the story along well, and the book doesn't become boring.

I enjoyed it, and I recommend it as a good book for a reader who can handle something more subtle.

Australian Nightmares
More Australian Tales of Terror and The Supernatural
Edited by James Doig
Equilibrium Books 2008



When I was younger I loved to search through second-hand bookstores looking for strange fiction. It was a grand journey through dusty paperbacks, ancient magazines and newspapers and many old decrepit shops. Along the way I made many unusual discoveries and found titles I still treasure today. However, as I get older the search becomes more difficult, the finds become fewer and with the cost of rent, second hand bookstores become less prevalent and they seem more aware of the value of the treasures they hold !

One of my favourite adventures was to look for unusual ghost, horror and gothic tales, it was amazing what you could find. However, missing from my discoveries were Australian stories, I always wondered why there was a dearth of older Australian supernatural fiction.

I was accordingly excited when I first read *Australian Gothic: An Anthology of Australian Supernatural Fiction* by James Doig. He had uncovered an amazing array of "missing" stories and forgotten authors. We not only received some uniquely top class fiction, but stories set within the Australian environment.

It was also a joy to be introduced to authors long since forgotten, authors whose work was of exceptional quality yet somehow had slipped through the pages of history.

In *Australian Nightmares: More Australian Tales of Terror and The Supernatural* James Doig has returned from another expedition into dusty libraries, old newspapers and magazines and forgotten collections. It is a journey not many of us have the time or perseverance to make and I for one am very pleased Doig is doing it for us !

In *Australian Nightmares* we have a great collection of tales ranging from traditional ghost stories to those of rats bearing disease, tales of vampirism to psychological terror, premature burials to obsession. This is a wide reaching selection with introductory vignettes on each author so we can appreciate their lives and work, most of which would have otherwise been forgotten.

Included here are many tales of terror and supernatural horror from the pens of James Edmund, Charles Junor, J. A. Barry, Morley Roberts, Ernest Favenc and even stories by the infamous Witch of King's Cross Rosaleen Norton.

This series of anthologies is not only entertaining but offers a unique insight into an overlooked facet of Australian literary heritage, that of the "gothic" strain within Australian literature. They are significant volumes and I recommend them highly.

If you don't already have the first volume, Equilibrium Books is offering a special deal on both volumes.

Equilibrium Books
Australian Gothic
Australian Nightmares

Web: http://www.equilibriumbooks.com/australian_nightmares.htm

Badmags
Tom Brinkmann
Headpress 2008
Book Website:
www.badmags.com
Headpress:
www.headpress.com

Badmags advertises that it will offer the reader "The Flip-Side of Popular Culture As



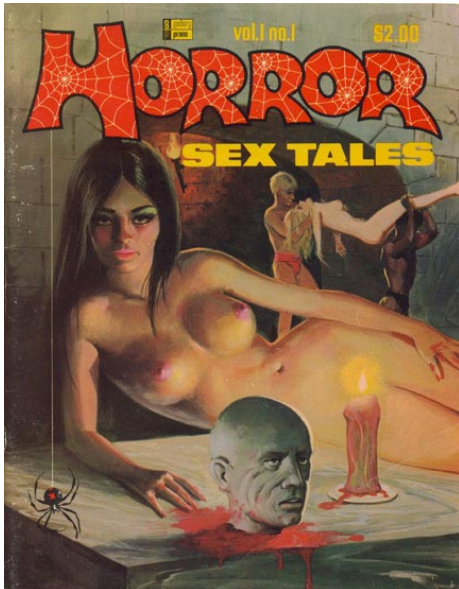
Seen Through Magazines and Tabloids!" and boy, does it ever do the job. *Bad Mags* goes where no other book has gone before, into the underbelly of "popular magazines and literature" to focus on the weirdest, strangest and sleaziest magazine published in the US from the fifties to the eighties.

What immediately stands out when you begin to read *Badmags* is the dedication of the author, it is clear that Brinkmann is not just a hobbyist, but a truly dedicated collector. He obviously has an incredible enthusiasm for the subject which has driven him to research the field in a way that goes way beyond obsession. This is a book which is packed with information, it brims with obscure facts and figures and every possible detail of the most bizarre magazines ever published. Moreover it also explores the strange individuals which inhabited this world and the unusual lives they lived and gives us detailed information of the shady publishing world which produced these explosive publications.

The first volume of *Bad Mags* covers over 200 publications, each listed with issue numbers, volumes, dates, publishers addresses, cover price, and page count. Each listing also has information on the articles and key features mixed with anecdotal information, including entries by David Kerekes. It is quite amazing just how much detail is included on each magazine and how many rare magazine covers, pictures and images this book includes.

This is a rare volume, in that it is the result of a true obsession. We have an individual with such a great love for a strange and wonderful subject that he wants to share his madness with the rest of us and hence has produced a truly eccentric and quirky book.

It is full of strangeness, sexual excess, political incorrectness and downright weirdness, so



much so that ever page is a marvel. From music to LSD, Lesbianism to bondage, Satanism and witchcraft to biker orgies, soft to hard porn, exploitation to strange hippy reflections, it's all there.

Headpress must also be congratulated on such a superb printing job. This is a book packed with fine, detailed illustrations and a vast number of magazine covers, most including photos and they have been reproduced with superb detail and clarity. Every page includes amazing pictures and images and they are reproduced in such brilliance that at times they look better than they would have in their original format !

Badmags is a startling and enjoyable romp through the underbelly of publishing and is a joy to read and look at. Even if you don't want to read it cover from cover you can always just dip in here and there and find publications that will defy your reasoning and shock your senses.

This is a treasure of a book which will become a must have cult title.

The Big Penis Book
Taschen Book 2008
Tower Books Australia
<http://www.towerbooks.com.au/>

"TASCHEN's books are always beautifully constructed and full of surprising content, and this one is no exception... more photographs guaranteed to drop jaws at your next cocktail party than you can shake a stick at."
Playgirl Magazine



Everybody likes tabletop books – architecture, landscapes, gardens and photography – however in the quest for more interesting and challenging titles the end result is the Big Penis Book – the ultimate tabletop discussion starter, and it will certainly stimulate discussion! If you leave it on your coffee table just watch the amazing reactions from your guests - from mirth to shock - some peak, some leaf through the pages with pleasure and others will try and pretend they don't see it at all!

This is a book which is big in every way, big in terms of quality, big in terms of the quantity of images and content and big in terms of the subject matter.

When we say big, we mean BIG, the minimum size seems to be from 7 or 8 inches at the minimum to some 12 inches in length. Since those possessing more than 8 inches make up less than 2% of the world's population, this guide to rare tools will certainly intrigue, fascinate and in many, trigger fits of envy.

The book itself is a superior hardback, oversized and produced to exacting standards. It is 12 inches by 12 inches and runs 384 pages and weighs seven pounds! It has extremely high quality photography and includes over 400 amazing photographs.

It is a truly beautiful and erotic volume.

While it may seem strange to talk about the text content, a bit like straight men telling their wives they buy Playboy for the articles, this book does include a lot of interesting commentary as well.

There are essays on the nature of the penis in photography, comprehensive discussions of major photographers, studios and profiles of such noteworthy models as the amazing John Holmes.

While this book tries to cover the whole spectrum of large phallic photography it is especially focused on studios such as Athletic Model Guild, Old Reliable, Colt, Falcon, Sierra Domino, Third World, and Champion Studios which brought the large member into the public arena during the Seventies in both print and film. There is also examination of the art of “digitally” altering dicks to look bigger than they are and the never ending search for the longest penis and the legends that have evolved along the way.

While this book will immediately have a following within the gay community and most of the studios featured were gay film and photography studios, many women will also enjoy this incredibly liberated look at large appendages.

The Big Penis Book is the ultimate guide to the large tool and certainly deserves a pride of place in any eroticists library.

Book of Shadows
Edited by Angela Challis
Brimstone Press 2006

Book of Shadows Volume One is a compendium of dark flash fiction from the first six issues of Shadowed Realms online magazine plus a selection of original stories. It features flash fiction by Poppy Z Brite, Terry Dowling, Robert Hood, Stephen Dedman, Kurt Newton, Greg Beatty, Martin Livings, Lee Battersby, Josh Rountree, Mikal Trimm, Melissa Marr, and many others.

So, what exactly is “flash fiction”? Flash fiction are tales which are under 1,000 words in length, while most fall within the traditional horror genre, it more rightly should be called Dark Fiction as it also includes some tales of which are more of a psychological and fantasy orientation.

Book of Shadows includes a wide range of genres within the “flash fiction” category, this



range from tales which are more traditional to tales of sex, violence, power and psychological torment. In many ways the shorter format demands an economy of language and a preciseness of style which brings the inherent darkness of a tale to the surface and hence is more suited to the more “savage” forms of horror fiction.

The stories start with very short entrée sized pieces; these are usually meticulously engineered tales with a twist in the tale. These are a nice selection of these bite sized morsels throughout the book and they certainly make you want more! Each tale is written so you cannot really appreciate what is occurring until the very last “bite” and while the content and styles varies, such tales are usually uniquely startling in what they reveal.

Personally, I found the longer tales the most appealing, 1,000 words seems to be just the right amount to create a superb story with a good plot, nice character development and a twist or turn which shocks the readers socks off! I am actually quite surprised how much plot and character development you can get in such a small space and it really shows off the author’s skill when they can offer such complex stories in such a compact form.

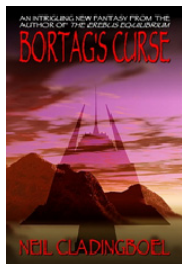
It is too easy to create a long tale in which things slowly are brought together, to create a succinct story which has solid plot, character development and a “dark heart”, while keeping the tale well paced until the right moment is a true art form.

There is so much to enjoy here from dark tales of psychological abuse and torment, serial killers to creatures, traditional horror to modern tales of violence and terror. Stories such as the abortion doctor who keep alive the children he had to remove as his own (deformities and all) will haunt your nightmares for some time later.

Brimstone Press is a small Australian publisher and I want to commend them for releasing such a superb anthology of such dark and challenging fiction. In these days of mass market distribution and large publishers it is imperative we get behind such ventures and give them as much support as we can, go to their website and buy a book or two today, you will be very pleased you did.

Web: <http://www.brimstonepress.com.au>

Bortag's Curse
Neil Cladingboel
Equilibrium Books
www.equilibriumbooks.com



A five thousand-year-old prophecy, which foretold the destruction of Bortag and genesis of Erebus, the astral hall of records, holds the key to a long-forgotten mystery of betrayal, tragedy and revenge in an ancient village. The ancient city of Bortag, home of the moon-worshipping Astronomers' Guild, is the backdrop for this intriguing journey through Earth's earliest history.

Jonathan Malone, exiled in Erebus has been assigned the task of researching this ancient culture and uncovering the secrets of Bortag's Curse, along the way he finds much more than he expects.

This fascinating tale is a real page-turner, it mixes high fantasy with a "sword and sorcery" type story set in a imagined Sumer like village. What is especially impressive is the way in which it intertwines two seemingly distinct tales. As the book unfolds there is what seems to be a simple tale of love, hatred and revenge in an ancient village and at the same time there is another tale of a strange astral dimension where all records are kept are "souls" are sent into incarnation to guide and influence man's evolution. Indeed, it seems that life on earth and many planets has been created through experimentation and through dubious direction from this other "reality".

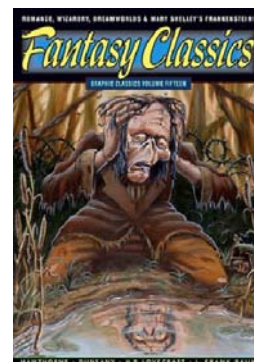
As these two stories intertwine, we come to see how the reality of this other world impinges on earth and the way in which these different realities affect each other. This is a masterfully written piece of fiction which brings together these different storylines into an intriguing tale.

It is intelligent and engaging and mixes together different genres to create quite a unique tale. At times it reads like esoteric fiction with occult and spiritual themes, at other times it is more "sword and sorcery", it unites these various themes into a work which keeps your attention right to the very last page.

Bortag's Curse is from the author of The Erebus Equilibrium series and can be enjoyed as a companion volume to the series or as a

stand-alone volume. I hadn't read The Erebus Equilibrium before Bortag's Curse, so now having gained a taste I will be getting the series post haste !

Fantasy Classics **Gothic Classics** **Horror Classics**



Eureka Productions offer a range of high quality "graphic classics" in a range of series. The ones which are most pertinent to our interest are the Gothic, Fantasy and Horror Series.

Each volume is around the 140-150 page mark with colour covers and high production values; the graphic printing is also high calibre and shows up the top quality of the artwork, reproducing every minute detail.

Each volume includes a range of what could be considered classic tales. The presentation seems to include a poem or short story to introduce each volume and then four or five classic tales. Each tale has been adapted by a different author and is illustrated by a different graphic artist. This means that each tale has a slightly different tone and a different look.

I find this especially enjoyable as it means we get to experience a range of different artistic flavours in the look and feel of each tale as well as different literary interpretations of these classic stories.

Eureka Productions is well established and Gothic Classics is up to volume fourteen, Fantasy Classics fifteen and Horror Classics ten. Each volume also includes a very comprehensive guide to the original authors, current writers and artists which are featured.

Gothic Classics Volume fourteen, for example, includes some superbly adapted Gothic tales. The story of Carmilla is superbly adapted by Rod Lott with haunting art by Lisa Web. The way in which she presents characters with uniquely "creaturized" faces is especially impressive.

The Mysteries of Udolpho is a more gothic than horror tale and is presented in a more traditionally "comic book style" which helps

traditionally “comic book style” which helps present a complex story in a graphic style.

Also included are the “twist in the tale” Gothic story of the Oval Portrait, Northanger Abbey and At the Gate. Gothic Classics cover the whole gambit of “Gothic” literature from vampires and ghosts to forbidden love, danger and intrigue.



Fantasy Classics Volume fifteen is a real page turner. It offers startling adaptation of Frankenstein again by Rod Lott but illustrated in a rather moody and “grotesque” style by Skot Olsen. Also included are The Dream Bridge by Clark Ashton Smith, the Dream Quest by Lovecraft, as well as the Glass Dog and Rappaccini’s Daughter. Each in their own unique artistic form offering a wide range of presentations, Rappaccini’s Daughter, for example, illustrated and adapted and Lance Tools has quite a unique graphic look which stands out for the other stories in this volume.

I have not seen the latest Horror Classics but if these and earlier volumes are anything to go by it will be equally impressive. There are also individual Graphics Classics volumes covering such authors as Edgar Allan Poe, H.P. Lovecraft and so on.

I find all of the titles produced by Eureka of exceptional interest, they not only are great ways to introduce younger readers to classic tales (they will hopefully be excited enough they will then read the originals), but each one offers their own artistic and literary adaptations of classics and hence are “original” in their own right and worth having a place within any horror, dark fantasy and fiction library.

Each of these volumes offer new adaptations of classic tales in both a written and visual form which help express some of the ideas and motifs within these tales in a new and fascinating way and I look forward to each new volume in these series.

Web: <http://www.graphicclassics.com>

Flashspec A Collection of Speculative Flash Fiction Edited Neil Cladingboel Equilibrium Books



FlashSpec is an anthology series, showcasing short, high quality speculative fiction from around the world. The uniqueness of flash fiction is that it emphasizes quality of over quantity since the story must be told in a limited space, indeed in this second volume the tale must be under 750 words.

It is certainly the case that less is more and most of the tales tend to be on the more unusual even darker side of fiction with unusual conclusions which are not what you would expect.

Some of the best tales are those which emphasize imagery and mood rather since these can be successfully evoked in a short tale, but this does not mean that there are not tales which offer impressive plot and character development in such a short space.

Volume 2 surpasses the high quality standard of the first volume and offers a range of tales from a diverse range of flash fiction authors from around the world.

While there has been some criticism of flash fiction being somewhat tired and using clichés and well worn literary twists, the tales in this volume are innovative, evocative and stretch the envelope when it comes to what flash fiction can be. It has been argued that Flash Fiction lacks narrative content, yet if we take as example Indigo by Debra Findlay, we have an excellent narrative created by what seems to be a lover and her potential suitor. It places us within the context of the characters and then hits us head on with the twist at the end.

Personally I think the editor has done an exceptional job of choosing some of the more creative and interesting flash fiction stories from what is essentially a flood of stories available.

Stories in this volume cannot be easily categorized and range from what could be defined as dark and horror to fantasy and tales with a psychological twist.

Of course, tales vary throughout the volume from short “snacks” to full length (750 word) Flash Fiction, but while they vary in quality, all kept my attention and interest and I highly recommend FlashSpec Volume 2.

Visit FlashSpec

<http://www.flashspec.equilibriumbooks.com/>
For information on both volumes.

Also visit: Equilibrium Books

<http://www.equilibriumbooks.com/intro.htm>
for a range of other impressive titles.

Flowers From Hell The Modern Japanese Horror Film Jim Harper Noir Publishing Web: <http://www.noirpublishing.co.uk>

Noir Publishing, best known for the publication of the Necronomicon series, has branched out to release a range of interesting and challenging books and one of their first major releases is Flowers from Hell.

Flowers from Hell, the Modern Japanese Horror Film by Jim Harper is an impressive and erudite overview of Japanese Horror. Rather than a simple sequence of reviews linked together with commentary (so often what passes for movie books in the mass market), Harper offers an extremely insightful series of explorations of key motifs within Japanese Horror with extensive discussion of cultural, historical and cinematic characteristics.

Each exploration includes extensive coverage of a wide range of Japanese cinema, reference to key Western influences, discussions of key directors and lots of coverage of genre films.

For example, he explores the development of the Zombie film in Japanese Horror with discussions of the influence of the West but how it was uniquely adapted in Japanese cinema since most bodies are cremated.

This understanding of the relationship between Japanese cultural history and cinema makes this an extremely fascinating study.

Time and time again Harper offers unique insight into the cultural difference which makes Japanese horror so impressive and backs this up with a near encyclopedic knowledge of Japanese film, anime and literature.

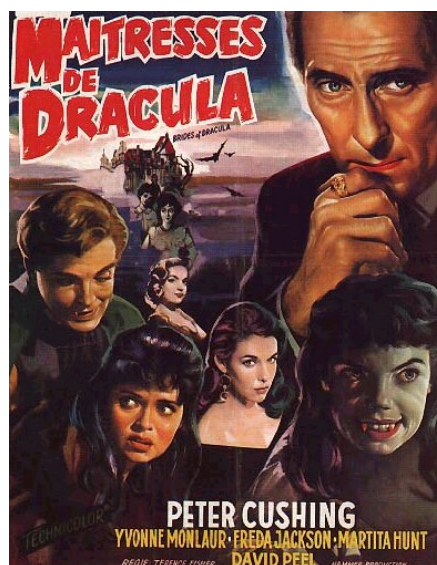


Whether it be ghost stories and their relation to folklore, psycho killers and their resonance with Japanese fear of urban crime, Zombies and their adaptation for Japanese funerary practises Harper offers a context for these films and hence produces a book which is of the highest calibre.

Flowers from Hell is a very comprehensive volume, illustrated throughout with black and white images and with a colour segment of movies posters and still.

This is certainly the most comprehensive book on Japanese Horror available on the market and covers everything from mainstream Japanese releases such as the Ring, Battle Royale or Versus through to rarely seen extreme films loved by cult collectors and with excellent focused coverage of key directors and filmmakers.

While many horror film devotees in Australia may find this volume hard to locate on the shelves, it is a must have book and I certainly recommend you either buy direct from Noir Publishing or via www.amazon.co.uk.



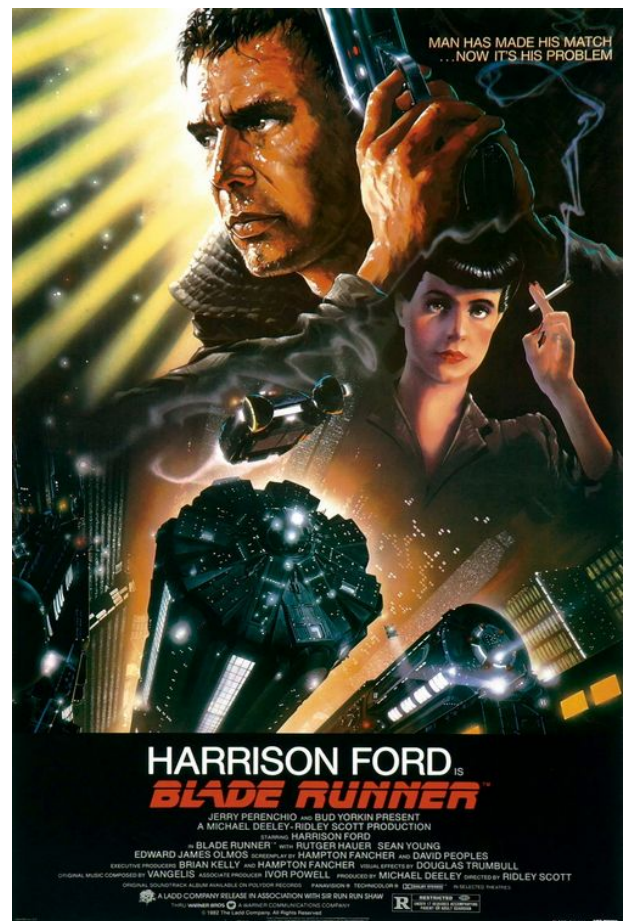
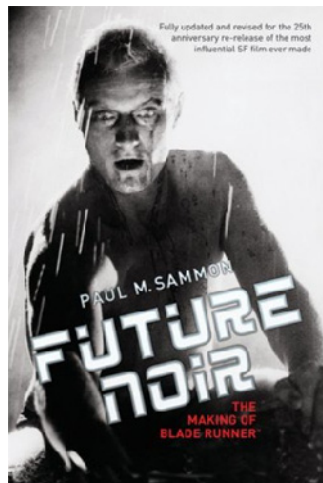
Future Noir The Making of Blade Runner Paul M Sammon Gollancz 2007

Blade Runner is really a phenomenon rather than just a film. While it began as simply an unusual and quirky science fiction film, it soon developed into so much more. The original tale (Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep ?) by Philip K Dick had so much to offer and the combined talent of Ridley Scott and the many screen writers, actors and special effects teams worked to bring this epic vision to the screen in a way nobody imagined. Indeed, it changed the face of science fiction cinema forever and surprisingly its influence still reverberates today.

Originally less than a resounding theatrical success with negative reviews, many thought it would be shelved forever. Yet with the advent of home video it slowly developed a cult like following with many versions, multiple editions and various releases and re-releases. Not many films are re-released after a theatrical failure with a second chance and then achieving a resounding success !

Future Noir is a book which only a true Blade Runner fanatic could write ! Sammon was there at the very beginning, working for a magazine documenting the early development of Blade Runner before it was even completed. He has followed the story all the way, documenting the twists and turns of this strange film, recording its history and keeping in contact with many of the people involved.

What has developed from his personal obsession is an amazing work. Future Noir offers a truly encyclopedic view of the Blade Runner "experience". It covers all aspects of the film's development from screen writing to special effects right through to personality clashes and controversies. It analyses and dissects the various effects used and the way in which the unique mood of the film was created in a way only someone with "inside information" could do.



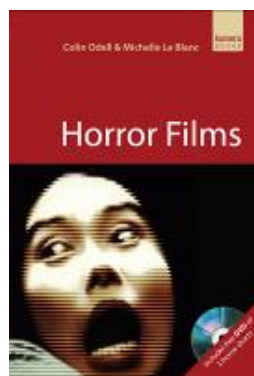
It explores the various releases of the films from the earliest theatrical release through VHS, Laser Disc, Working Print, Director's Cut to the latest Final Edition. In the later sections it even explores the reverberations of Blade Runner through literature, the internet and the cyberpunk movement.

While this may sound heavy going, Sammon has a very down to earth writing style and includes many tidbits of gossip, memories and reflections along the way so the reader really comes to appreciate the truly momentous effort that was required to bring Blade Runner to the screen. Sammon also includes black and white images from the film throughout the book which help document the evolution of Blade Runner.

For those Blade Runner obsessives who want absolutely all the details, the appendices include all sorts of technical information as well as complete documentation of all aspects of the film. These range from all the different releases to lists of Blade Runner blunders ! There are some twelve appendices packed with all the information any fan could ever want.

Horror Films
Colin Odell &
Michelle Le Blanc
Kamera Books

Australia: Tower Books
Includes DVD of Horror Shorts



Horror Films is a small but surprisingly comprehensive cross cultural introduction to Horror. It is nicely presented, includes a small selection of colour photographs and a free exclusive DVD of three short horror films - Virus, Savage and Chicken Soup

The first section of Horror Films explores the psychology and experience of Horror and is informative as well as entertaining. It considers the simple question of why horror films work and what makes them such a powerful form of cinema. Odell and Le Blanc discuss the nature of fear and the way in which film-makers manipulate our fears to create the experience we understand as Horror Cinema. They discuss some of the major patterns of horror cinema and how such films are constructed. They also discuss such related subjects as genre, censorship, violence and sex.

This is followed by an impressive overview of Horror Cinema in Europe, the Americas, Asia and Australia. The essays which comprise these sections are succinct yet comprehensive and offer a historical overview of horror within each region. It is clear the authors are exceptionally well versed in cinema as they not only provide a historical timeline for horror cinema in the various countries but offer select reviews of important titles. Each general section also includes chapters on specific countries with historical overviews and related reviews.

Horror Films is really quite an achievement for what seems at first glance such a small work. The reader will come away with a good understanding of why horror cinema works, how it works, historical backgrounds to horror cinema in countries ranging from Britain to Korea, Spain to Australia and will have some idea via capsule reviews of what films to begin watching if they so desire.

This is one of a series of titles from Kamera books and if all of them are as impressive as

this one then I suggest film buffs look out for each.

Independent Cinema
D.K. Holm
Kamera Books 2008
Australia: Tower Books



Comes with a bonus DVD:

Film of Film as a Subversive Art

I must admit I am very taken with the Kamera range of film books. They are well produced, comprehensive yet compact in size and succinct. They include focused content, reviews of key films and even relevant DVDs as part of the package ! They border on the authoritative when it comes to content and offer overviews of major film genres in bite sized packages.

These titles are of interest not only to the film fanatic but to any student of cinema, indeed they would prove of exceptional value in TAFE and University film courses. The volume on Independent Cinema is especially informative, in begins with an impressive overview of Independent Cinema with an insightful discussion of exactly what Independent Cinema is and then explore various "forms" of Independent Cinema in the chapters which follow. By choosing a limited number of proponents of Independent Cinema the author is able to get to the heart of the subject rather than packing the book with unnecessary "facts and figures", rather than taking an encyclopaedic approach, Independent Cinema stresses quality over quantity.

Holm then examines Independent Cinema as a means to enter the mainstream, as a form of autobiography and as truly micro-budget and Independent, each chapter focuses on specific major Independent film-makers with related reviews of their major films. This is followed with an extensive discussion of the future of Independent Cinema and a range of interviews.

There is also a solid resources section outlining key DVDs, Books and websites. As an added bonus there is a great DVD, Paul Cronin's Film of Film as a Subversive Art which focuses on the work of Independent filmmaker Amos Vogel.

Infected
Scott Sigler
Hodder and Stoughton
2008



Scott Sigler is an internet phenomenon, he shot to fame with his podcast downloads of his novels *EarthCore* and *Ancestor* with downloads reaching over three million. *Infected*, billed as "new horror" is really a science fiction thriller is his first UK novel, also released in Australia.

Imagine the War of the Worlds as interpreted in the 21st century. Sigler has packed some amazing ideas and concepts into this fast paced science fiction cum thriller novel. It offers us what we fear so much today but with a twist – an exploration of what a biological attack may be like, but not from terrorists but from somewhere else...

The seeds dropped from the sky like snow, billions of them, smaller than specks of dust but deadly. It began with itchy, blue triangular growths on their skin—that eventually result in the carriers becoming deranged and violent.

Three people face a race against time.

Perry Dawsey, an ex-footballer, washed up and in a dead-end job, must race to find a cure for the rash that has appeared on his arm and is spreading fast. The voices in his head have started and he knows something is very wrong.

Dew Phillips, an agent with a classified unit of the CIA with a chip on his soldier over the death of a young colleague in the line of duty, and Margaret Montoya, a government biologist, must try to stop a modern plague that drives its victims to insanity, murder and suicide.

This is a powerful science fiction thriller, told from multiple perspectives through the mouths of its various characters with cliff hanging chapter headings and packed with intrigue.

Infected has film rights already sold to Rogue Pictures.

Into Me/Out of Me
Edited by Klaus Biesenbach
Texts by Georges Bataille
Klaus Biesenbach and others
Hatje Cantz 2008
Tower Books Australia (Distributor)

Into Me/Out of Me is a superbly produced photographic volume with some 282 illustrations, 215 in colour, the text is in both English and German. It is controversial, explicit and challenging.

Into Me/Out of Me was the title of a P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center and KW Institute for Contemporary Art Berlin exhibition. It was curated by Klaus Biesenbach, Curator in the Department of Film and Media at The Museum of Modern Art, and the Founding Director of KW.

The *Into Me/Out of Me* exhibition was about imagined, descriptive, and performative acts of the passing into, through, and out of the human body. The exhibition offered works that spanned some forty years and included over 130 artists. It was also a truly cross disciplinary presentation include works which fell within what is traditionally considered art and performance art but also works from natural science, mythology, ritualistic and religious frameworks and sexual exploration.

It was a highly controversial exhibition which polarized art reviewers wherever it was shown, with primary presentations in New York, Berlin, and Rome. In the present day when Puritanism and conservatism seems to be encroaching on freedom of expression, *Into Me/Out of Me* reclaimed the body as a means for artistic expression and deliberately pushed the edge of the envelope in its exploration of flesh and more flesh.

Sad to say, as with any exhibition, it only reached a relatively small audience on a global scale and hence its effect was limited. It is now marvelous to see the exhibition turned into a high quality photographic volume.

Just some of the artists represented in this work include Abramovic, Matthew Barney, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Douglas Gordon, Robert Mapplethorpe, Paul McCarthy, Pipi-lotti Rist, Andy Warhol and Lawrence Weiner.

The framework of *Into Me/Out of Me* looks at

the personal and social dimensions of the physical body as a means of expression, with specific focuses on the various processes which involve the invasion, penetration, and exploration of—as well as exit from—the human body. Therefore the exhibition (and this volume) focuses on metabolic functions (eating, drinking, excretion), procreation (sexual intercourse, conception, birth), violence, and illness (injuries, surgery). As can be expected the works presented are explicit and at times confronting, but always thought provoking. Each of these themes are explored with reference to everyday life, myth and religious, ritual and behavior, science and medicine and personal experience.

This print edition of the exhibition by Hatje Cantz does a superb job, presenting not only the images, but backgrounds on the artists and key texts.

In many ways the book is better than the exhibition as you can explore and consider the message of the exhibition in comfort and take your time slowly reading, examining and considering. Yes, even the print edition is not for the squeamish and includes explicit images and is obviously for mature souls who want to honestly consider the human body in all its glory, from its most base functions right through to the sublime. But for those willing to take the journey it is well worth the effort.



Untitled by Robert Gober

Master of the Mysteries The Life of Manly Palmer Hall Louis Sahagun Process Media

Web: <http://www.processmediainc.com>

The Secret Teachings of All Ages published in 1928 by Manly Palmer Hall was truly a magnum opus, it was a tome of obscure knowledge, forbidden ideas and superb marketing ! It was presented in a format which was akin to a Grimoire with strange and impenetrable images, arcane descriptions and a presentation which made it look rare and unique. It is even more astounding which you realize this work was written when Hall was only 28 years old.

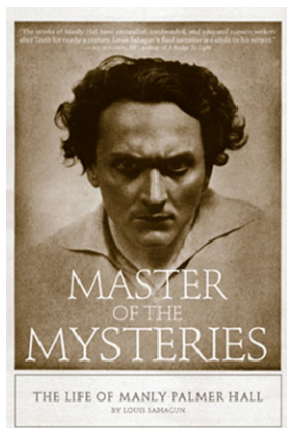
I remember first seeing this volume in my youth, it was a book every occultist, esotericist, witch and pagan had on their shelves, even though I doubt any had actually read it cover to cover. The first editions were slip-cased with full colour images and a limited distribution (with a price to match), these were followed by various other editions including the Jubilee edition, reduce sized edition and even, finally, a paperback reading edition ! The attraction of this volume was always in its presentation, while it lacked a certain academic credibility, its alluring artwork, leather like cover, arcane texts and emphatic emphasis on ancient wisdom made it a winner. Hall's insistence on holding the secret wisdom of the ages to be the core of all religions and symbol systems made him a beacon for those unsatisfied with conventional religions and made this and his foundation exceptionally successful.



What has always intrigued me was the man behind this volume. Throughout the years Manly Palmer Hall continued to run the Philosophical Research Foundation producing one volume after another of arcane wisdom (some seventy five in all) and producing a veritable library of lectures, talks and smaller works. Indeed he continued to lecture and write up until his untimely and questionable death at the age of 89 in 1990.

He also accumulated one of the most amazing libraries of esoteric texts in the United States.

Yet he was an incredibly private man, while he has the strength, some say arrogance of someone who believed he had the "knowledge", he decried the cult of personality and avoided placing his private life in the limelight.



At the same time Hall was a phenomenon; he lived during the renaissance of occultism in California and was friends with a large number of politicians and high flyers. His unique vision of the United States as being at the forefront of spiritual evolution and his lecture style which combined arcane knowledge with homespun wisdom made him an immensely charismatic figure. He was central to the 30 and 40's occult movements in California and again returned to popularity during the Sixties occult revival.

His life is nearly as fascinating as the myths and legends he expounded, indeed the circumstances of his death are still a matter of controversy with rumours of murder. Surprisingly, there has been no biography of this strange and enigmatic man until now.

The Master of the Mysteries: The Life of Manly Palmer Hall (Paperback) by Louis Sahagun is the very first comprehensive examination of the life and work of Manly Palmer Hall and it is certainly a joy to read. It is exhaustively researched and illustrated throughout with rare ephemera, images and photographs.

The volume offers an "insiders" view of how a Canadian teenager with a sixth grade education could arrive in Los Angeles in 1919 and transform himself into part sage and part occult scholar, develop one of the most suc-



cessful esoteric organisations of the twenty century, one that continues today and become known and respected worldwide. It is a surprisingly honest book which while avoiding explore the rumours and controversy surrounding his life and death and to discuss his critics and detractors as well as his admirers.

His personal life is also covered including his difficult marriages, the first ending in his wife's suicide, his second to a woman who was abusive as well as the strange circumstances surrounding his death.

This is a bold, daring and intelligent biography, which offers a credible examination of a life of a man who is seen by many to be one of the greatest occultists of the twentieth century. It is beautifully illustrated, superbly written and masterfully edited.

The Master of the Mysteries is a must have volume.

Necronomicon

Book Five

Edited: Andy Black

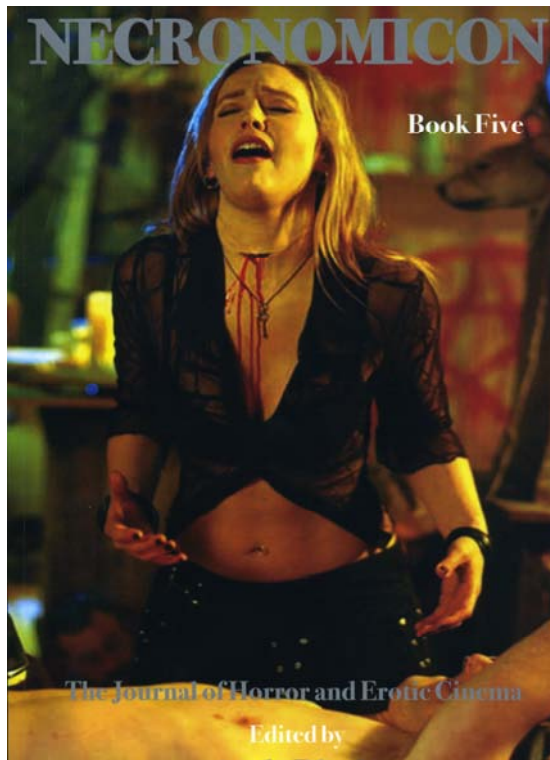
Noir Publishing

Web: <http://www.noirpublishing.co.uk>

Necronomicon is a well established series published by Noir Publishing and edited by Andy Black. Each volume offers erudite and informed examinations of major themes, concepts and trends within horror, cult and erotic cinema. They are beautifully illustrated throughout with a wide range of images and photos, have attention grabbing covers and represent a quality in production which is always a joy to see.

Articles are always well informed and take a deeper look at their subject matter than most publications, this is not a "gore explosion" horror magazine filled with puff pieces about the latest splatter film, but an irregular journal (paperback sized) offering in depth explorations into the world of horror and cult cinema.

Necronomicon, indeed, is marketed as a book rather than as a journal or magazine for that reason, what is offered is really an anthology of essays and full length pieces, some of which could be expanded into a book on their own. Each volume is worthy of a place in any film lover library and offers some of the best horror journalism available.



In the latest release, Book Five, there is a lot on offer.

First there is an exploration of Buffy the Vampire Killer and the way in which Buffy combined soap themes with horror and moved the genre in a new direction. Along the way we come to understand the way the feminine is represented in horror cinema and the unique way in which Buffy broke new ground with a new kind of female horror hero.

Scariest than Monsters is a comprehensive study of the history of sexual murder in art and film from Weimar to the United States, it is extremely comprehensive and covers everything from mainstream films such as Silence of the Lambs and Hannibal to such extreme releases as Necromantik.

The Killing Box is a specific study of themes within the film of the same name, while Becoming Monster is a superbly esoteric study of the concept of transformation and becoming in the work of Deleuze and how this is seen within the various transformations seen throughout horror cinema. This is especially insightful considering how "transformation" from one form to another (the human to the monstrous, for example) is central to so many horror classics.

Holidays in Hell explores the theme in so many films, notably recently in the Hostel films, where the horror exists in the other,

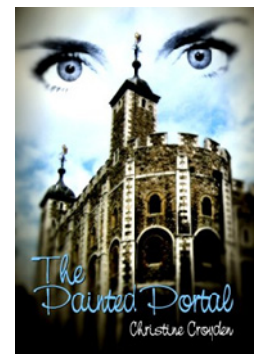
usually another country, less developed and has various prejudices which develop from an Xenophobic view of the world.

I could, of course, continue essay by essay, Necromomicon Book five is packed with content. There are essays on the concepts of anti-communism found in the film The Thing and a superb discussion of the revival of Zombie films.

This is a highly significant series for anyone with more than a superficial interest in cult, horror, art house and related cinema. It is erudite, informed and thought provoking. It combines deep insight into the themes and motifs of horror cinema with focus articles which look at specific films or trends in cinema as well.

Each volume is a careful balance of different types of essays, all of which will keep you interested, informed and entertained. It will have a pride of place in my library and I suggest it should in yours as well!

The Painted Portal Christine Croyden Equilibrium Books



The Painted Portal is the first novel by Christine Croyden and it is certainly an impressive debut. It begins as what seems to be a simple coming of age tale based on a young and somewhat immature Australian girl who travels to London as part of a student exchange program. She lives in a world of art and daydreams and is uncomfortable in the world around her. When she reaches London, she finds herself isolated from other students and her only friend, Marion, is an elderly eccentric art restorer. She becomes obsessed by a painting of Lady Jane Grey, but all it not as it seems as slowly the dreamlike world in which Sara lives begins to become real.

Through the painting she enters a ghostly world where the spirits of the dead move between paintings, pictures and physical locales to continue their earth bound existence, obsessed with the failures and successes of their lives and struggling to find portals to return to the physical world.

The Painted Portal is a beautifully executed tale, combining historical drama, a love of art and a fantasy story of earthbound spirits whose sole desire is to return to the living. Each of these motifs are intertwined into the life of a young girl who is coming of age and dissatisfied by where she is and yet unsure where she has to go. Together these elements create a novel which keeps you intrigued right to its fascinating conclusion, has many twists and turns and is written with a light, dreamlike quality which is both engaging and seductive.

Paradoxia
A Predators Diary
Lydia Lunch
Akashic Books 2007
www.akashicbooks.com
Tower Books Australia



Paradoxia is a powerful and unrelenting experience; it is not so much a book to be read as to be experienced, it is written in an extremely poetic way so even in the most revolting and challenging sections, there is a beauty and artistry.

Rather than making excuses for life and allowing herself to be pigeonholed into the dichotomies of victim or perpetrator, predator or prey, good person or bad person, Lunch simply tells it as it is. Her life is a bit like a “law of science”, if you do this, this happens. No moralism, no excuses, no bullshit, just brutal, raw, cut right to the bone honesty.

This is a very explicit book and the sex scenes are unflinchingly described, but these are not to titillate or even to entertain, they are simply to explain what has occurred to Lunch and those around her. Since sex, drugs, violence, abuse (both to and from) are part of her experience, then everything is included and nothing is denied.

This is a book which triggers all manner of emotions; it is sad, happy, scary, downright terrifying at times, most of all it is authentic. So many biographies or memoirs are written to reflect a certain view that the person has of themselves, sometimes infamous but usually good even self righteous. Lunch seems to have created a book as much for herself as



others, it is like an exorcism, an ejaculation of memories, uncensored by rational thought and simply allowed to inhabit the pages of Paradoxia which in some ways reads like a private diary.

There is so much pain in Paradoxia, when you read the story of the Spanish Nazi, for example, he may be violent, sociopathic and dangerous and yet he is a product of an environment which was all those things and more. The one message that comes strongly from this volume is that no one is innocent, society in its violence and hatred has created a generation which is a product of its venom. The poison is returning to the source. This is not a cop out, Lunch is not making excuses for what is done or has been done, she simply explains why it happened. There is no reveling in infamy here, nor excuses or apologies, simply a record of a life experience and through reading it she hopes we can gain some understanding of ourselves.

Lunch herself is a one off; she was the primary instigator of the No Wave Movement and was a major focal point of the Cinema of Transgression. She is a talented musician, writer and photographer and continues to express the darkness which exists within her through a variety of media.

This is a book which will confront anyone who reads it and probably offend many, but perhaps that's its power, by offending, confronting and even threatening the reader, it makes us consider the experience of Lunch's life and the experiences that created her.

The Raw Shack Texts
Steven Hall
Text Publishing
Australia 2008

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich



It's rather hard to classify this book, but in the end I decided on science fiction. There is a "parallel universe" made up of the thoughts, words, emotions of this world, past and present. The thought world can be likened to a great sea, and this sea has spawned its own life forms. The principal one is a great shark-like creature called a Ludovician, who eats the thoughts and memories of people in the real world. It leaves only an empty shell behind

Eric Sanderson has just woken up without a single memory. The Ludovician has attacked in the night. Fortunately Eric has been attacked before. Sensing another attack building, he has left enough information behind to prepare the new Eric to resist the next attack. And another attack will surely come, for the Ludovician waits only long enough for its victim to accumulate new memories and emotions, then strikes again. Eric must learn to camouflage his mental processes long enough to find help to fight off the shark. But how do you fight a creature composed of the worst nightmares of other people?

The book is classic British "what if ???" science fiction, and defines a whole new plausible world for the characters to interact in. It could be heavy going, but Steven Hall's style is light enough to keep the plot moving with elements of humour to lighten it.

A certain well-known shark movie provides the background for the final showdown, and why not? When you say "shark", what movie will most people remember? It could just be parody, but by this point in the book you will be adjusted to the thought world and accept it as it is – the result of thousands of memories defining a shark attack.

The book takes a little while to settle down, until you (and Eric) become used to the notion of a world composed of thoughts. It's a really good read and I recommend it to anyone who is past the Star Wars type of Sci Fi.

The Steel Remains
Richard Morgan
Gollancz 2008



Ringil, the hero of the bloody slaughter at Gallows Gap, is a legend to all who don't know him and a twisted degenerate to those that do. A veteran of the wars against The Scaled Folk, he makes a living from telling credulous travellers of his exploits. Until one day he is pulled away from his life and into the depths of the Empire's slave trade where he will discover a secret infinitely more frightening than the trade in fives.

Archeth - pragmatist, cynic and engineer, the last of her race - is called from her work at the whim of the most powerful man in the Empire and sent to its farthest reaches to investigate a demonic incursion against the Empire's borders.

Egar Dragonbane - steppe-nomad, one-time fighter for the Empire finds himself entangled in a small-town battle between common sense and religious fervour.

But out in the wider world there is something on the move far more alien than any of his tribe's petty gods.

The Steel Remains is a superbly ambiguous novel. Morgan offers us his own take on fantasy and it is nothing like you have read before. Gone are the black and white morality of Tolkien and the easily identified heroes and villains of many a fantasy tale.

Gone are the traditional definitions of character. Morgan offers a world filled to the brim with real people – dysfunctional people, morally questionable people, people whose characters and lives cannot be easily defined nor understood.

At the same time Morgan writes with his usual style - hard hitting and visceral, offering solid character development and dark plotting, this is a cross genre tale which mixes fantasy with science fiction, horror and a lot more...

Studies in Australian Weird Fiction 1
Edited Benjamin Szumskyj
Equilibrium Books
Web: <http://www.equilibriumbooks.com>

Studies in Australian Weird Fiction is a welcome surprise to the field of Australian horror and weird fiction. It strikes a perfect balance between articles, interviews and symposiums and covers a wide and diverse range of authors and subjects in its approximately 200 pages.

The articles offered can be best divided into introductions to obscure Australian fiction writers, analytical studies of various authors and discussions of specific motifs within Australian horror and weird fiction. There is also a comprehensive checklist of Australian Fantastic literature through to 1960.

All of these articles are well written, thoroughly engaging and thought provoking. There are some fascinating introductions to Australian writers of the past such as Lionel Sparrow and Vernon Knowles and an excursion into the weird verse of Christopher Brennan. While it is hard to isolate specific personal favourites among the articles, I found the introductions to obscure Australian writers fascinating. James Doig's article on Lionel Sparrow as a real eye opener and it is great to see unknown writers being rediscovered and brought to the attention of a larger audience.

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James Doig's article on Lionel Sparrow as a real eye opener and it is great to see unknown writers being rediscovered and brought to the attention of a larger audience.

(Readers interested in this field should also look up "Australian Gothic An Anthology of Australian Supernatural Fiction 1867 – 1939" edited by James Doig which is also available from Equilibrium Books).

The interview section of Studies in Australian Weird Fiction 1 includes interviews with many significant Australian authors and offers insight into their interests, writing careers and the nature of their personal philosophies and how this affects their works.



There is also a celebrity columnist, Robert Hood, which offers his reflections on the state of the nature of horror in historical and modern terms..

The Symposium on Picnic at Hanging Rock is especially informative giving a range of opinions and attitudes in regards to this seminal work. As an atheist I found the discussion of Christians and horror rather out of place, I feel they intrude too often into the world of literature and film and should keep their "vices" to themselves !

This is a volume packed with content. There is no padding or excess, it is filled to the brim with intriguing and thought provoking content. Every article seems to mention new authors to be discovered new books to be read and new ideas to contemplate.

The only problem I can see is that I will spend the next few months looking up and purchasing all the books recommended and will then have to read them all !

This is a very impressive work and I hope Volume 1 is the start of a long and successful series.



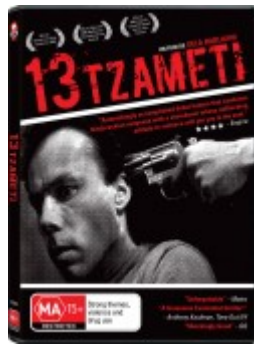
DVD AND FILM REVIEWS

13 Tzameti
English: Thirteen 2005
Siren Visual 2008
R4 DVD

From Les Films de la Strada

Directed & Written by:
Gela Babluani

Reviewer: Bob Estreich



The first effort from Producer/writer Gela Babluani, this dark suspense movie shows his potential in the genre. It is filmed in black and white, which adds to the moodiness, and subtitled for the English-speaking market in clear white on black.

Sebastian is a young impoverished worker, struggling to support his family. He is currently repairing a roof for Godon, a retired man with a serious drug habit and no apparent income. He overhears a conversation where Godon admits he is broke, but he is waiting for a letter with a job offer that will put everything right.

When Godon dies of an overdose, Sebastian, facing ruin for the expenses of the job he will not now be paid for, has no hesitation in stealing the letter.

It contains a train ticket to Paris and a prepaid hotel bill. Unaware that he is also being followed by the police who were taking a close interest in Godon's jobs, Sebastian departs for Paris. At the hotel he is contacted and given a ticket for a rural railway station. He eventually comes to an isolated house, where he meets his employer.

A ring of gamblers meets regularly in such places. They each provide a gunman for a "game" of last-man-standing Russian Roulette. Because Godon is dead, his gambler / sponsor must accept the unknown and untested Sebastian as a replacement.

The thirteen "players" stand in a circle, one bullet in each gun, and point their gun at the head of the man in front. At the signal they must shoot. Survivors will face the next round

with two bullets in their guns, and so on. It is made clear to Sebastian that there is no backing out. He must kill or die.

The relentless buildup of tension is the main point of the movie. The plot is secondary. There is no room for skill in this game, just sheer blind luck. Even the promise of a large amount of money if he wins cannot help, and Sebastian just continues the game like a robot, completely under the control of others. He sinks deeper into depression and fugue as around him men die violent deaths.

Babluani's direction only allows brief flashes of character development, and the characters he paints aid the bleak feeling of the movie – the gambler whose "player" was killed in the first round and must now beg other gamblers to let him put money on their players; the gambler's assistant who explains the rules to Sebastian and looks after him between rounds, but expects to be paid well for his help.

The gamblers are an undesirable lot, there to make money from the death of others. They contrast to the players themselves, who are a hopeless lot, either drunk or right on the edge of their nerves or foolishly confident of their luck.

Some reviewers have commented that the film is too long. Possibly the buildup in the early part could be shortened a little, but not the game. The game IS the movie, and shortening it would ruin the slow carefully crafted buildup of tension.

The film has already won Film Festival prizes, and has attained something of a cult status.

There is a rumour of a U.S. remake, but it can't add anything to this movie.

My suggestion – see it now in its original form.

Extras include:

The Brothers Babluani – interview with Gela and Georges Babluani
Number 6: Interview with Aurelien Recoing
Testimony of a Survivor
Deleted scenes
Trailer

1408

Mikael Håfström

Actors: John Cusack

Samuel L. Jackson

Roadshow

R4 DVD

Stephen King has churned out horror stories for years and the quality of these vary greatly as do movies made from them. Some have been exceptional successes others have, well, been only well received due to his reputation as a horror author. In my mind, this is the first “made from a Stephen King” story for some time which really does achieve some of the greatness of the “early Stephen King”.



John Cusack plays Mike Enslin, a cynical author who achieved a measure of success with his first novel but now writes travelogues of supposed haunted attractions, ranging from hotels to phantom infested lighthouses. He views these as tourist traps but plays along with the myths and legends to make a living. He is unhappy, alienated and disenchanted but he continues day to day, locale to locale, hotel to hotel. Some time earlier he left his wife after the death of heir only child and has a unhappy relationship with his father who is now in a nursing home and who was the subject of his first book.

As a tourist writer he receives lots of mail from potential haunted hotels but among all the advertising and spiels he finds a postcard from an unknown sender advising him not to stay in room 1408 at the Dolphin Hotel in New York.

At first he thinks this is just a gimmick since the name enumerates as 13 and is tempted to write it off as just another form of advertising. But when he tries to book the room he finds the hotel is less than cooperative and he begins to take notice.

He undertakes some rudimentary research and finds a range of bizarre and brutal suicides and murders have occurred in room 1408 and his eagerness to explore the legend of the room increases.

After some pressure from the legal eagles where he works he gets a preliminary booking

in the room. But when he arrives at the hotel the eccentric manager Gerald (played admirably by Samuel L. Jackson) tries everything including offering him a pent-house suite to stop him staying in Room 1408. After a strange and rather witty confrontation between them he at last makes it into the room.



At first it is a total disappointment, it just looks like any other room and he begins to records his standard cynical notes about the rumors of hauntings and the very average nature of the room. But small strange incidents begin to occur, ranging from chocolates appearing on his pillow and toilet paper folding itself – and suddenly it seems something else is afoot.

John Cusack as the cynical reporter/writer is impeccable, his smart tongue, rather sharp dialogue and edgy wit gives the movie a dark humor which is lacking in many other horror films. Don't get me wrong, this is not a horror comedy, this is a very dark ride indeed, but it does not follow the more common cinematic paths of horror film-making i.e. using gore or comedy or a combination of both. Rather it uses special effects, character, suspense and mood to weave a fascinating tale, if not somewhat convoluted tale.

There are some truly suspenseful set pieces; one especially powerful sequence is played out in the air conditioning ducts as Enslin is chased by a phantom. There are lots of interesting special effects, some intriguing twists and some great innovative filming. The false ending and twist in the plot about two thirds through is extremely powerful, giving the viewer a chance to breathe before a final onslaught. It is also nice, for once, that a major US horror film does not conclude with a happy ending.

1408 is a ghost story which relies on suspense rather than gore and uses a wide range of techniques ranging from special effects to music, suspense to emotional sub plots, innovative filming to creative subtexts to create a highly successful tale.

30 Days of Night Icon Films R4 DVD

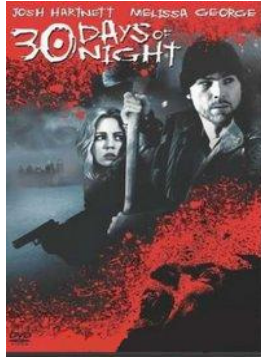
I have always loved vampire films, the old Hammer classics, the romantic figure of Christopher Lee and of course, the rampant eroticism of Lestat and the Anne Rice novels. However, there is an anomaly within such depictions. Vampires are predators who live on human blood, they hunt and kill humans, so while we may gloss over the point and enjoy some of the more "romantic" imagery of sex and death, I have always felt that the sheer animalism of the vampire has been missing. If we look at the animal kingdom and examine predators we could presume that if vampires existed and we were the prey they would be something like portrayed in this highly creative adaptation of the myth.

While the "vampire as animal" does occasionally appear in more "gothic" oriented movies such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* or *Underworld*, and to a lesser extent within Anne Rice's various novels, it is with *30 Days of Night* that the vampire as a true predator and as an animal is brutally depicted.

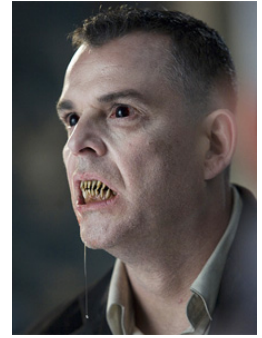
The film is an adaptation of the Steve Niles-Ben Templesmith graphic novel *30 Days of Night*. The simple yet innovative premise of both the comic and the film is that once a year the sun sets in the frozen, remote town of Barrow, Alaska, indeed Barrow is the northernmost settlement on the whole North American mainland. It is a real town and is considered part of the Arctic Circle, its temperature and unforgiving environment makes it one of the harshest places to live in the world.

As darkness approaches, Barrow is left without contact with the outside world except for some radio equipment, its last plane has left and the town's people are alone, they will remain so for the next 30 days.

Vampires have to feed; they like to feed in the dark and would prefer not to be noticed as humans become rather difficult when they realize they are prey not predators. So what a better choice as a feeding ground than an isolated, lonely town, where there is no means of escape.



Sheriff Eben Oleson (Josh Hartnett) is faced with a bizarre series of crimes as the last hours of daylight begin to fade. Somehow all the cell phones in town have been stolen and burnt, the watch dogs have been brutally slain, the radio transmitters have been destroyed and the town's infrastructure is under attack. Many of the locals have left and those who remain are getting a little nervous, many of them live in Barrow as they do like being disturbed by the outside world and its intrusion is making them testy.



At first these attacks seem like random events, yet as time progresses Oleson begins to suspect there is another agenda in play. His fear becomes tangible with the arrival of a crazed stranger (Ben Foster), not only cannot he account for how he arrived in the middle of nowhere but he babbles about others on the way. At the same time Oleson has to deal with the fact that his estranged wife Stella (Melissa George) is still in town, having missed the last plane out. They are now stranded together in mutual dislike for the next 30 days. This mixture of "prey versus predator" and personal tensions is what makes *30 Days* especially impressive.

As more isolated killings occur, Oleson realizes the town is under attack and the death toll is rising. He realizes that there are many killers and they are not like anything he has even seen, it seems they are not even really human. The horde of vampires led by Marlow (Danny Huston) are not like the romantic figures of legend. They are brutal predators, they don't just nicely bite the neck of their victims, they tear them to shreds and are given to frenzied mass orgies of violence. There are no religious overtones here either, the vampires can be killed by heat and fire and injured by direct attack but not much else. They speak in a guttural tongue and look like a mixture of human and beast, they are clearly intelligent but in the way an animal is.

This is a lot to like about this film - its frenetic pace, its brutal presentation of the vampires as true predators and its unrelenting gore and violence.

At the same time, there is solid character de-

velopment, you feel for the survivors and what seems like a hopeless battle against all odds. The romantic interest between Oleson and Stella is, of course, rekindled and offers a real human touch in touch in a film which is otherwise a maelstrom of violence and slaughter.

The ending is a superb reversal of traditional vampiric lore. Oleson injects himself with vampire blood so he has the strength to fight off the vampires and defend Stella, as the film ends she holds him in her arms and he dies as the sun rises. Love has triumphed and rather than the vampire's death being the end of the cycle, it is Stella's survival.

The special edition is a 2 DVD set and includes lots of extras including:

Special Features:

Audio commentary with cast and crew
Pre-production featurette
The Vampire featurette
Building Barrow featurette
The Cast featurette
The Look featurette
Blood Guts & Nasty @\$% featurette
Night Shoot featurette
Stunts featurette

Boogeyman II Reel DVD R4

The title Boogeyman II does not really do justice to this impressive horror and psychological thriller, a sequel to boot does not necessarily give one a lot of confidence. Yet surprisingly it ends up as a very tense and powerful horror film with an impressive plot, convincing acting from all involved and excellent climax.

One of the major assets to this film is that the role of the Doctor is played by Tobin Bell who also played "Saw" in the movies of the same name and this gives the film a certain feel and mood. The violence and gore is intense, certainly way beyond anything in the original Boogeyman film, indeed, it is hardly a sequel but more of a new film simply using the franchise name for marketing purposes.

Laura and Harry witness the brutal slaughter of both their parents. The intruder is never

caught and being young children, they blame the killing on the boogeyman. Some ten years later they are still traumatized. Harry has spent some time in a psychiatric hospital and seems to be cured and ready embark on a new career. As he is leaving for San Francisco, he suggests

Laura also go in for treatment as she is not handling the idea of living alone well at all.



The psychiatric hospital is running a clinic for people with various fears and phobias. These range from anorexia to agoraphobia, a kid who is afraid of germs and of course, a number of patients afraid of the dark.

They have a young psychiatrist Dr. Ryan who has also gone through the process of conquering her fears while the clinic is overseen by Dr. Allan, played by Tobin Bell.

As Laura settles in things start to go awry, one of the patients dies in the basement. Has he killed himself in a panic to escape the dark or is something loose in the hospital? This mixture of psychological terror with a possible serial or even supernatural killer makes the film extremely effective. You are never quite sure if it is all in their minds or whether the bogeyman is real, or, for that matter whether he is human or something else.

Along the way the plot thickens when Laura discovers that Dr. Allan supervised another clinic in which a patient died because of his treatment, is this all a game, a radical form of therapy or is Dr. Allan the killer.

As the death toll rises, each patient brutally slaughtered according to their fears and the gore quotient goes off the scale! There are some innovative death scenes and a lot of edge of your seat moments.

The climax is suitably impressive, we find that Dr. Allan, during therapy, attempted to force Harry to face his fears by locking him in a dark closet and this precipitated a total psychotic break. Harry now identifies with the bogeyman and is forcing the other patients to face their fears with devastating consequences.

As the film ends Harry has manipulated the death of the clinic supervisor Dr. Ryan, dressed in the bogeyman mask and escaped. Is this a sign of another sequel ??

This is actually a surprisingly fast paced horror film, on some levels it seems it owes quite a bit to The Nightmare on Elm Street mixed with the ultra gore of Saw. However, that being said, it is still quite an effective slasher/horror film.

The acting is solid and convincing and the use of a mental hospital where phobias are explored adds a level of reality to the story-line. This is an accomplished effort with lots of blood and gore, an intriguing plot and enough edge of your seat moments to keep you watching til the very end.

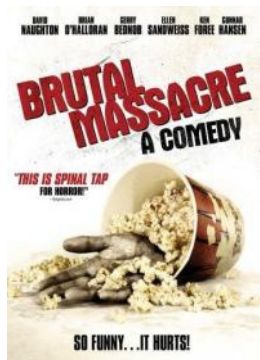
The Reel DVD release is the unrated Director's Cut.

**Brutal Massacre:
A Comedy
Anchor Bay
R1 DVD**

David Naughton of "An American Werewolf in London" stars as once famed B Grade horror director Harry Penderecki whose career has been plagued by violent mishaps and critics' attacks. His one great success was many years ago and has been followed by a sequence of lack lustre horror releases, each one a little more ridiculous than the last.

Harry decides to take one last attempt at fame and working with an obnoxious assistant director, a foul-mouthed production manager, a very oddball cinematographer and a cheap crew, there things go from bad to worse. With every possible disaster that can befall a film coming his way, he battles against all odds to make a great horror film.

Brutal Massacre is a witty but ultimately light-weight comedy. It has some fun cameo appearances including the 'Ladies Of The Evil Dead' Betsy Baker and Theresa Tilly, Fangoria editor Tony Timpone and Master Of Horror Mick Garris and revels in sending itself and the horror movie industry up.



As a mockumentary it is amusing and certainly has its moments, there is a good level of wit and to anyone with a background in cinema there is a lot of "in" jokes, but in the end it doesn't really rise above the ordinary.

It is certainly not the "spinal tap of horror" and certainly won't have you rolling with laughter, but it does have enough humour to make it worth a watch.

Brutal Massacre is an enjoyable enough way to spend 90 minutes but don't expect too much.

**Captivity
Roadshow
R4 DVD**

Captivity is a provocative and controversial film. It certainly is a harsh and violent viewing experience. While some have written the film off as brutal and mean spirited, I believe that if you stick with it and watch it right through it can be a riveting cinema experience. Granted, there are scenes which will revolt and repulse, but when these are viewed in the context of the overall film I feel they are justified and are counterbalanced with the psychological edge of the film.



The first section of the film is deliberately disorienting. You watch the action from a number of different actions, from the would-be victims perspective, from a normal "viewers" angle and through the viewfinder of a portable camera. The film moves quickly from shot to shot, is strangely edited and has an unmelodic soundtrack which puts you on edge. You then see Jennifer, a fashion model, drugged and she awakens in a sealed room. You know she is in trouble.

Held captive in a cell, she is subjected to a series of terrifying, life-threatening tortures that could only be conceived by a very twisted, sadistic mind, indeed.

These range from being force-fed body parts to seeing acid eat away another victims face, I warned you this is not for the faint of heart.

These scenes are very confronting and violent, but at the same time it is the psychological environment created by the movie which is most powerful.

The portrayal of Jennifer held captive, the disturbed use of technology, the sexual manipulation – all are very well portrayed and certainly put the viewer on the edge. The acting is superb and convincing.

At around the 45 minute mark you begin to wonder where the film can go, is this simply a captivity film, is there more the gore and violence? However luckily, things then quickly move up a gear and get more interesting, a lot more interesting and everything is put into context.

Jennifer has been played off against Gary, who is a prisoner in the next cell. However, something seems amiss, just why is Gary being held captive ? As Gary and Jennifer are manipulated into an emotional and finally sexual bond, you begin to get a sense of what is occurring. At this stage you see a video of a kid who has been sexually abused by his mother killing her; this one motif tries to explain the motivation behind the killer. But exactly who is the killer ?

As Jennifer falls into a drugged sleep, Gary walks free from the room and you realize he is one of a team of two killers. It seems that Gary killed his mother as he brother watched and together they have been “gaining trophies” by kidnapped women, forcing them into Gary’s embrace and then killing them. You then see the whole video where Gary kills his mother and his brother watches on.

However, this time Gary wants Jennifer forever and no longer wants to play the “trophy game”, he kills his brother, but by now things have escalated too far and the killings multiply when the police arrive.

Of course, things don’t go Gary’s way and Jennifer finds the scrapbooks which document his multiple conquests and the game is on.

This is a powerful film which attempts to get inside the mind of a killer, yes it has moments of brutality but I think that the complaints about gore in this film are overplayed. The psychological violence is what makes this film an edgy and harsh experience, its plot’s while

perhaps a bit stretched, keeps your interest and the ending is suitably climatic.

Captivity may not have covered a lot of new territory, but it is still a successful psychological horror film with some unexpected twists and turns which make it worth a watch.

The fact that some people find it uncomfortable means the director must be doing something right !!

The Call of Cthulhu R1 DVD

Microcinema

www.microcinema.com



There have been many adaptations of the work of H.P Lovecraft with the Cthulhu mythos developing a cult following in both literature and film.

While many films have attempted to re-create the mood and feel of his many works, the Call of Cthulhu has proved the most difficult with the quality of film adaptations varying greatly and none especially successful.

This adaptation is a real triumph; it follows the story closely and embodies the unique mood and feel of the work. It is all the more impressive when you realize this is the work of a small independent society rather than a large studio !

The story begins in a non-descript Arkham Asylum, where we find the clearly disturbed great-nephew of Professor George Gammell Angell of Brown University.

He is outlining to a doctor the terrors that have befallen both himself and his family and requesting that all of his papers be destroyed for the benefit of mankind.

It is from this nexus that the story unfolds in a meandering sequence of flashbacks and visions.

Each of the flashbacks tell the story of those poor souls who experience dreams of a strange city and its inhabitant Cthulhu and re-

-turn with various forms of madness, if at all. These tales climax in the tale of the fishing vessel Alert and its experience in the South Sea. During a storm the ship takes refuge on an uncharted island, what they find is beyond their comprehension, as this isle is the great city of R'lyeh and is the home of the great god Cthulhu.

This version of the classic tale is nothing short of spectacular. It has been made to look like a 1920's silent film and creates a mood which is second to none.

The film looks perfect with the beautiful sepia sheen of a 1920's film; it has deliberate occasional scratches and lines and creates the illusion with style.

The soundtrack was made by a team of five composers and in conjunction with dialogue cards and no speech, creates a quite unique viewing experience.

The Call of Cthulhu has received rave reviews and won numerous awards, it is a must have DVD !

Dame Edna's Work Experience **Umbrella Entertainment** **R4 DVD**

Dame Edna Everage is an Australian institution. A comedic persona created by Barry Humphries, she first appeared in a Melbourne comedy revue in 1955. While Humphries does have other comedic personas, it is Dame Edna which has brought him most fame and continues to be his main vehicle for his unique blend of wit and sharp edge humour. Humphries humour is strongly satirical and for this reason has courted controversy on many occasions, Dame Edna is very much a take it or leave it type of humour, either you get it and love it or you don't.

Over the years Dame Edna has toured the world and achieved an incredible level of success, with live shows, TV performances and series and constant guest appearances on everything from Jay Leno to Parkinson and many Australian programs such as Spicks and Specks. The Dame Edna Everage Christmas messages are always something to remember.

While many female impersonators emphasize the illusion of the female persona or "drag", Barry Humphries takes the role a lot further, since 1955 he has created a whole personality, family and history for Dame Edna who has really taken on a life of her



own. Humphries has emphasized the Australianness of Dame Edna, her bizarre dress sense and double entendre to create a character which is unique in the history of female impersonation.

Indeed, his ability to use his persona to make the most risqué and possibly offensive comments and discuss subjects normally taboo makes him quite a one off performer. The way in which Dame Edna deals with celebrities in her various interview programs and chat shows is astounding and she is able to get them to discuss the most intimate of things by her mixture of humour, sarcasm and wit.

In the late Nineties Dame Edna decided to do a grand tour of Britain's work places to report on the state of the nation and therefore staged an unusual show in Wigan based in a baked bean factory.

"Take me where someone works for a living, take me to Wigan, where normal people lead normal lives. Let me get my hands dirty," declares the Grande Dame to a packed room of startled factory workers at a baked bean factory in Northern England.

Dame Edna Work Experience sees megastar from Moonee Ponds get down to the factory floor and chat with ordinary blue-collar folk about their lives, recent developments in their relationships, and herself, of course. The Dame Edna Work Experience is a different sort of Dame Edna show, rather than working with celebrities or playing off interviewees, she works as a stand up comedian, feeding off questions from the audience and an occasional planned event (such as Madge Allsop).

This makes the show a little more "uneven" than her interview shows, some sections seem a little flat compared to others and it is clear

that Dame Edna works better with semi-prepared material than live. It also does seem that a blue collar audience is a little unsure what to make of a sarcastic drag performer putting on a show in their factory.

This does not, however, detract from the overall experience; the show is fun, enjoyable, in superbly bad taste and highly amusing.

The show climaxes, of course, with a uniquely Dame Edna song !

Extras include:

The Naked Bunyip Excerpt
"Guess Whose Mums Got A Whirlpool' TV Ad
Teaser Trailers from Barry McKenzie Holds His Own

Highly recommended.

Dark Ride Icon Films Australia R4 DVD

Dark Ride is one of eight films featured in the After Dark Horrorfest and it has had a limited release in US theatres and reaches Australian shores on DVD via Icon. Dark Ride harkens back to the Slasher films of the Eighties, it has lots of gore, nudity and as many scares as it can pack in.

Using a ghost ride as the background to the major horror section of the film allows the film-makers to create a textured background filled to the brim with classic images of horror and violence as well as provided a vast number of wrong turns, jumps, starts and "fake scares".

The plot is suitably bizarre. A family runs a ghost attraction at a local amusement park called the "Dark Ride", the younger child is seemingly normal, while the older, Jonah is deformed and has the mental age of a young child but the oversized body of a strong adult, he lives imprisoned in the basement of the ride. He kills and mutilates two young girls using their bodies to create new attractions, "Jonah see, Jonah do". He is locked in a mental asylum.



This brings the film to the present where a group of rather unlikeable college students decide to take a road trip. Along the way one of them "finds" a brochure on the ride and they decide to give it a look.

Earlier Jonah has escaped from the asylum after been taunted with a steak (!) and the smell of blood sends him into a fury, killing the guards he makes for the Dark Ride.

Of course as Jonah and the students collide bloody mayhem erupts, there are some nice twists and turns and an especially nice ending with the unveiling of one of the group as Jonah's younger brother.

The guts and gore factor is high with some superbly done special effects (I especially like the head splitting of the security guard) and a good balance of violence and suspense.

Is Dark Ride a success ? Well, I am unsure.

While it has a lot of pluses with some great suspense sequences, the characters are unlikeable and the build-up to the action at the Dark Ride takes way too long. Except for the interlude at the asylum, the set up of the road trip etc seems to continue forever especially with a group of rather bland and irritating characters.

That being said the use of a carnival type background gives this film a great texture and mood and it certainly is superior when it comes to many other "teen" horror films on the market. The acting is reasonable and while the characters are not especially endearing, once you get through the buildup and into the Dark Ride it is worth the wait.

Darling!
The Pieter –Dirk Uys Story
Umbrella Entertainment
Web: <http://www.umbrellaent.com.au>
R4 DVD
Also:
Web: <http://www.darlingmovie.com.au>

Pieter-Dirk Uys' Plays Online
Web: <http://www.pdu.co.za/home.htm>

"I was doing a show in Sydney. Afterwards, I was handing out Aids ribbons and this 15-year-old boy came up to me and said the show had changed his life and that he wanted to tell my story. And wragtig [good grief], a year later he knocked on my door". -Pieter-Dirk Uys, *The Times*.

So begins the story of this moving and compelling documentary. Julian Shaw, an Australian filmmaker, negotiated a 'Independent Learning Contract' with his Australian high school, allowing him to attend school two days a week whilst working on preparing and shooting *Darling!*, a documentary on the life and work of Pieter Dirk Uys in South Africa.

Pieter Dirk Uys is a South African institution; he is both loved and loathed, being both a great entertainer and educator, yet also a thorn in the side of those who refuse to deal with the inequalities of life, whether it be the racism of apartheid or the lack of AIDS treatment for the poor. He has a razor sharp wit, able to deal with the recalcitrant and foolish and yet great compassion and affection for those in need.

He uses a range of characters to satirize political figures including some quite astounding drag personas; the most greatly loved is Evita Se Perron. Uys began his satirical form of entertainment during the apartheid regime and

was under constant attack from the government and conservative forces, indeed he was lucky to survive with his life. As freedom came to South Africa he began his work on HIV/AIDS. With all the humour, venom, satire and compassion he can muster he visits

schools throughout South Africa entertaining and teachings about HIV/AIDS. He does this at his own cost without government or corporate financial support.



When he is not travelling and educating, he runs the Darling Trust and writes and performs plays and one man shows. He has written and performed 20 plays one-man shows throughout South Africa and abroad. He is also highly respected as a South African freedom educator and reformer and counts among his friends Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela.

While this documentary is about Pieter Dirk Uys and Evita Se Perron, it is also about the genocide that is occurring in South Africa due to government inaction. As Pieter Dirk Uys so admirably states genocide in 2008 is not war or brutal oppression, but the quiet inaction which allows the poor to die without medical treatment.

Only in 1999 did the South African government admit HIV causes AIDS and the health minister still stands by her views that fruit, vegetables and olive oil in a diet are as effective AIDS treatment as retro-viral medications. It is only in recent times that the SA government has set up clinics to dispense HIV/AIDS drugs and there are only 51 such clinics across the whole of South Africa. Thousands of people die each day in South Africa and yet still the care offered is scant with the government showing a cavalier disrespect for human life. It is hard to understand how a government can ignore the sheer scale of the disaster with current estimates stating some thirty million may die with whole generations wiped out.

This is a moving documentary, which offers both a exhilarating look at an amazing life, and a sad and reflective vision of a country which is in denial about the medical emergency on its doorsteps. Shaw brings a naiveté and openness to the documentary which makes it real and raw. It is not some "Hollywood" slick production filled with facts and figures, but an up and close personal view of a single, perhaps lonely, man trying to do the best he can against an avalanche of suffering.



Julian Shaw has done a superb job giving us a carefully edited and succinct documentary which captures both the life of this larger than life character and the horror which is AIDS in South Africa. Shaw has built an impressive career, despite his tender age. He won the 2007 IF Independent Spirit Award for 'Darling!', which was also runner-up in the Panorama Audience Awards at the 2008 Berlinale, voted on by some 20,000 filmgoers. 'Darling!' won Best Documentary Medium in Australasia's largest international documentary competition DOCNZ, where Julian also received the coveted DOCNZ Best Emerging Filmmaker award.

Dororo
Madman Ent.
R4 DVD

www.madman.com.au

Dororo is a Japanese fantasy/samurai movie based on an original Manga by Tezuka Osamu. The film is a unique blend of action and fantasy and offers an "adult" adventure tale. The film was shot in New Zealand, directed by Akihiko Shiota with Ching Siu Tung as the action choreographer and features some breathtaking photography and landscape shots as well as loads of action.

The plot is as fascinating as it is strange; Daigo Kagemitsu is a violent warrior who bloodied by war, makes a deal with a gaggle of demons (forty eight of them in all) to gain the lands he requires and kingship over the world, the catch is he must give them his unborn son. When the child is born, all forty eight demons have taken parts of him and his is just a small living stump, rather grotesquely portrayed as a strange deformed baby. Rather than allowing Daigo to kill him, his mother abandons him in a river leaving his fate to the gods. He is rescued by an old wizened healer, Jukai, who using long forgotten sorcery and healing cures fashions for him a body made from the limbs of children killed in war. However, as soon as the child develops, he is haunted by goblins and spirits. A local musician passing by gives Jukai (and by default the child), a special sword called Hyakkimaru, which is especially empowered to kill goblins.



It is from the name of the sword the child gains his name.

Hyakkimaru now goes on a quest to regain his original body, to do so he must kill all forty eight demons and uncover the truth about his past. Along the way he meets the comedy interest of the film, Dororo, a petty thief who tags along for the ride. Together they go on a sort of fantasy road trip, killing monsters, meeting strange people, getting in and out of trouble and trying to piece together Hyakkimaru's past.

As the film slowly develops, and it is two hours and some twenty minutes long, there is lots of action, monster killing and attempts at humour. It is a fairly consistent film with action right the way through, I never found my attention waning, though I did find Dororo's constant attempts at comedy a little irritating, I felt the action aspects of the film succeeded well, however, the attempts to lighten the film with humour were rather forced and distracted from the storyline.

The climatic conclusion is impressive as Hyakkimaru and Dororo have to come to understand each other since Hyakkimaru's father is the one who has killed Dororo's family and tribesman and Hyakkimaru must face the father who betrayed him to the demons for fame and fortune.

The plot is certainly convoluted but innovative enough to keep the viewers attention. The CGI and special effects on the creatures vary, some are extremely impressive while others are a bit too obvious, at times it reminds me of a quirky Godzilla film.

Dororo is a fun romp, it mixes together an eccentric script, great action, awesome sword-play, monsters and some great large scale battle scenes, what more could we ask for !

**The Edgar Allan Poe Collection
Volume. 1:
Annabel Lee DVD
Lurker Films
R1 DVD**

Edgar Allan Poe (January 19, 1809 – October 7, 1849) was an American poet, short-story writer, editor and literary critic, and is considered part of the American Romantic Movement.

While he is best known for his tales of mystery and the macabre he was also one of the earliest American practitioners of the short story and is considered the inventor of the detective-fiction genre. He is further credited with contributing to the emerging genre of science fiction.

George Higham is an unusual artist to say the least, after graduating New York's School of Visual Arts, George Higham spent some years doing freelance special-effects work and traveling the world. Somehow or other, he ended up back in NYC x-raying corpses from the morgue and from there began to explore the creation of stop motion animation and the various forms of "dark art". His SVA thesis film, *NECROMANIA* was broadcast on PBS.

His early career consisted of creating special effects for film and television. He then began to create sculpture and jewellery for world-wide gallery exhibition and sale.

When you bring these two visions together, Poe and Higham, something amazing results.

Inspired by Edgar A. Poe's poem *Annabel Lee*, Poe himself comes to life through the magic of stop-motion animation in a brooding and dark short film by George Higham.

It is hard to describe the unique experience that awaits you in this film. Through the expert use of puppets, stop motion animation and a tortured soundtrack we enter the mind of Edgar Allan Poe through our experience of his tale *Annabel Lee*.



I watched this short film a number of times and noticed more and more each viewing. It has resonances with German Expressionism and at times seems more like a living painting than a film, each image has been carefully prepared for maximum effect and indeed every screen includes a vast number of carefully crafted elements.

At first it seems strange to be emotionally moved by puppets but within a short time reality is suspended and you enter into the nightmare world of a love which has been lost.

The world created is truly overpowering and is like experiencing a nightmare fixed onto a TV screen, it is disturbing, dark and deeply moving.

The music is by Bill Warford and Pat Gillis of Northern Machine and mixes a Gothic sound with industrial and dark ambient elements. It is a powerful soundtrack and creates a uniquely melancholic mood.

Annabel Lee is a truly dark visionary experience and is unique in its exploration of the soul of Edgar Allan Poe.

This DVD also includes an excellent retelling of the *Raven* by Peter Bradley, a short based on the *Tell Tale Heart* by Euro Horror legend Paul Nashy and some nice extras including a Poe Biography and interviews with the various film makers.

Released by **Lurker Films**
Web: <http://www.lurkerfilms.com>

Distributed by **Microcinema**
Web: <http://www.microcinema.com>

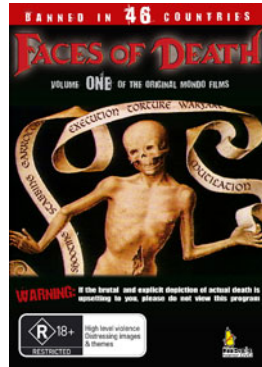
**Faces of Death
Volume 1 of the
Classic Mondo Series
Umbrella Ent.**

In the 1980's shockumentaries were the flavour of the day, their supposed aim was to show us a world we didn't know, from Asian customs to strange death rites, from native superstitions to unusual sexual practices, but in reality they were the epitome of exploitation cinema. They took our fascination with the exotic and the unknown and threw it back in our faces in a variety of bizarre and distorted forms.

While there were many shockumentaries most of which proved quite successful, Faces of Death was the most impressive. It was originally made for a \$450,000 investment and has an estimated \$40 million thus far ! It was originally only made for Japanese release, but slowly began to leak into the international market to alarmed reactions. The fact that it seeped into the market via underground methods with clandestine copies on unmarked videotapes and then only received public release only increased its reputation. It ended up being banned in some 46 countries

What is amazing is how the media jumped on the bandwagon and never really researched or questioned the film, John Schwartz, who directed and wrote the movie and its sequels, was startled to note the sudden US media coverage the films was getting, they were being denounced on every channel from CBS to independents yet nobody talked to him to explore what they were about or more importantly, how much was real.

What is behind much of the Faces of Death furor is the mythology of the snuff film. The term snuff is used to represent a film which shows real death, with the person or persons being actually killed, without digital or special effects, for the enjoyment of the viewer. The first recorded use of the term is in a 1971 book by Ed Sanders, The Family: The Story of Charles Manson's Dune Buggy Attack Battalion and this gives us some background to where it all began. While it was claimed the Manson family made snuff films of their killings they were never found and books such as the Ultimate Evil by Maury Terry which



made vast numbers of such unsubstantiated claims had to be withdraw and rewritten under threat of legal action.

The concept of the snuff film came from the early fear and paranoia created by the Manson killings and the anti-hippy backlash at the end of the sixties, it is also interesting that this paranoia has surfaced time and time again during various periods, usually fed by diverse conspiracies theories and quite a bit of religious Puritanism. After exhausting examination, the FBI in America and other agencies worldwide have never found a single snuff film nor by the way did they find any evidence of the vast conspiracies claimed.

It seems ever generation can be gripped by fear and terror and the fear of death is clearly the greatest of them all. Accordingly, Faces of Death really touched a raw nerve. Introduced by a rather strange doctor (Dr.Gross), we are introduced to his collection of footage which is the result of his research into death.

Certainly, the footage includes what the industry defines as "stock footage". The director in various media interviews had discussed how he searched video libraries worldwide for clips of disasters, slaughterhouses, animal killings, autopsy rooms etc, however, most of the over the top scenes are clearly faked, indeed even the famous electrocution scene was supposedly created with lots of toothpaste foaming from a friend's mouth !

Schwarz said in an interview with the St. Petersburg Times in 2000 "I was the leader of the flesh-eating cult," Schwartz admits. "I had scenes in each of these movies. . . . I'm the crazy, drugged-out killer. . . . I play this freaky rapist in the courtroom scene, and they show the rape on video, and it just so happens that the girl (in the rape scene) was this girl I was dating at the time." He continues.. "I am listed



in *Faces of Death* credits as "Alan Black." "My middle name is Alan, and schwarz means black in German."

This does not, however, invalidate the nature of the film, it is too easy to be caught in the debate of what is real and fake footage and forget that this is a work of cinematic art, dark art, confronting and shocking art perhaps, but art nevertheless. Its presentations as a documentary is a marketing hook, its effectiveness as a film is something else.

Faces of Death must be evaluated as any other film and judged as such, it has a profound emotional effect and mixes exploitation cinema with a truly perverse obsession with death and destruction created by high quality editing, intriguing narration and effective yet cheap special effects.

Released in 1978 it not only set the stage for later shock cinema but also for films which blur the line between documentary and cinematic story telling. It was released around the same time as *Alternative 3* (1977) which was a fake documentary suggesting a secret base on the moon which triggered hysteria and hundreds of thousands of calls to Anglia Television asking if it was real. In the end they had to issue a press release and news bulletin advising the documentary was a film and not real !! Today such films as *Death of a President*, which uses a mixture of real and fake footage to explore what would occur if the president of the USA was shot are regularly seen on the market, while still triggering some controversy.

It is amazing to think that even today the vast majority of people who watch *Faces of Death* believe it is real. The emotional impact it has is startling.

By combining real "stock" footage and carefully edited and cheaply created special effects it forges a mood and experience which is confronting and powerful, considering this was made in 1978 it is a testament to the dark vision of its director. In Australia this film has had a lot of censorship problems and it is great to see it finally available in a high quality DVD edition, also included is the 39 minute documentary *Faces of Death Fact or Fiction*.

Faces of Death is a challenging unique cinematic experience, there have been many attempts to copy it, such as the later *Death*

Scenes, but its cinematic style, coupled with careful selection of footage and impressive editing and special effects put it in a class of its own.

From the Orient with Fury

Ken Clark

Dorado Films

R1 DVD

www.doradofilms.com



Ken Clark is Agent 077 in "From the Orient with Fury" (aka as *Fury on the Bosphorus* and *Fury on the Orient*), an international spy thriller with worldwide appeal, or so the description goes of this quirky yet charming Eurospy James Bond clone.

The film has a typical spy drama- secret weapons theme with its opening scene showing Professor Kurtz being badgered by the media for information on his latest discovery, a beta ray gun which has total disintegration power. While he is being hounded by the press, his supposed minder is kept busy with a fake international phone call long enough that the professor can be kidnapped, with a replacement body booby-trapped with explosives left in his place.

It takes a while but Dick Maloy is hot on the trail of the missing doctor who is being held captive by the evil Goldwyn (Franco Ressel), who wants to sell the beta ray gun to the highest bidder. But it is not just the crime lord who wants the weapon, the Russians are on it's tail as well.

With some truly strange and bizarre gadgets ranging from self developing camera belts to the evil poison pin lighter, cigar lock picks to Morse code-sending suspenders, this film does not take itself too seriously. But it should not be written off as simply a B grade Bond copy, it has a charm and style of its own as do all the Agent 077 films and should be experienced on its own merits.

Ken Clark as Dick Maloy is suitably over the top, handy with his fists in the most outrageously bad fisticuffs you will ever see and his FBI partner Margaret Lee who looks like a Marilyn Monroe copy has got to be seen to be believed.



While she is meant to be some sort of spy, she seems only to be there to walk around looking superb and getting into trouble.

The dialogue has its strange moments too and the plot seems to wind in and out of intrigues involving the FBI, CIA, KGB, super criminals and a few others thrown in for good measure.

The music is what today is considered retro lounge, it is so out of date that it is cool and groovy and adds a lot to the experience.

The conclusion of the film is notably over the top with lots of "beta ray" special effects, some impressive overacting and a nice bit of harpoon action.

Ken Clark is the real calling card here, originally starring in major Hollywood films such as South Pacific and the Last Wagon, he headed towards Europe as the parts began to run dry and became known as the "European" James Bond for his role as Agent 077. Suitably B grade, his work has become nearly classic in cult film circles.

Difficult to locate for many years it is great to have such a rare film now available in wide-screen and with restored soundtrack and audio, sure it still shows it's age here and there, but considering the condition of the original prints it is still an amazing achievement.

The picture is reasonably clear with only a small number of jumps and some flecks here and there and the sound is as clear as an bell. It is a solid soundtrack in stereo with very clear dialogue.

This is a silly, fun sixties eurospy classic at last made available in a form which does it justice.

Global Haywire
Director Bruce Petty
Hopscotch Films
R4 DVD

Subtitled "A short history of planet malfunction", the film poses the question: Why have we reached the present crisis point between East and West? Bruce Petty offers his own unique view of the world situation with a flair that is not often seen on documentary filmmaking. The mixture of real action, animation, cartoons and interviews with major commentators as such as Gore Vidal, Noam Chomsky, Tariq Ali and Robert Fisk and character actors Robyn Nevin and Barry Otto make this riveting viewing.

It is difficult to classify this cinematic experience; part documentary, part media barrage; part comedy, part leftist commentary; all narrated by the dry voice over of Tom Baker, it offers a withering satirical look at the role of the West in generating the disaster the world is in – i.e. global haywire.

It would be too easy to write this off as a wild diatribe; Petty offers lots of solid factual evidence for the current world situation having its roots in Colonialism, religious bigotry and the imperialism of the West. He also takes a clear aim at the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Throughout the program petty spends a lot of time coherently arguing his case albeit with a phantasmagoria of images, sounds and cartoons.



While it is said by many that Petty is arguing against democracy or capitalism in toto, if one listens close enough, Petty presents his argument with much care - that is that capitalism and democracy are not the problem per se but that they are only ever applied in the West. He presents the case that while the West wants democracy and freedom (i.e. the A deck in his imaginary flying ship), we sustain dictatorships and exploitative regimes (in Deck B) so we can have the goods (especially oil) that we need. Rather than Petty offer a traditional extreme left position - out with democracy, he offers an intelligent and perceptive critique of Western hypocrisy and self centredness and proposes that if we really believe in democracy it must be a truly worldwide model not based on imperialist and nationalist prejudices.

What is so disturbingly successful about Global Haywire is the way in which Petty has made such a heavy political critique palatable. Global Haywire is fun to watch and hard to not to enjoy, even if the message is a dose of strong medicine helped with a large spoon of "sugar".

The sheer exuberance of the imagery, the bizarreness of the characters and the power of Petty's style make this a enjoyable and informative cinematic experience.

Gozu

Takashi Miike
Siren Visual

www.sirensvisual.com.au

Gozu is a strange and surreal film, for many it is considered one of the classics of Japanese surrealistic cinema.



Each character is developed in such incredible detail that each time someone arrives on screen you know you are in for a new experience. In many ways the individuals from Gozu remind us of the "black humour" of Little Britain or perhaps more like "A League of Gentlemen". Nobody is normal; everybody is neurotic, perverse and psychologically scarred. This is a Freudian view of the world where everyone's hidden desires are manifest and nobody is normal. This is a film which has resonances with everything

from French Surrealist cinema to the works of David Lynch.

The film begins with a simple yakuza meeting; however, Ozaki, one of the team is going a little weird. He is convinced that the Chihuahua in the arms of his boss's lover is actually a Yakuza killer Chihuahua and he must kill it. He throttles it, throws it around his head and smashes it to the pavement. His growing insanity and paranoia is obvious to all. The boss asks Minami, his best friend to arrange to have him "taken to the dump" i.e. terminated. He convinces him they must visit Nagoya to meet another team and off they go, along the way there is more evidence of his madness as he becomes convinced that a simple car driving behind them is a "Yakuza" killer vehicle !

Thus begins a strange travel tale where nothing and nobody is what they seem. As the journey unfolds they get within a short stop of Nagoya but a river seems to appear from nowhere in front of them and separates them from their destination. I read this river as the unconscious and as they cross into Nagoya, they enter into the unconscious mind, Minami loses Ozaki and the search for him begins, he dare not return to his boss with his task uncompleted. This is somewhat like a sacred journey, a vision quest, a pilgrimage but of a demented and unconscious type, filled to the brim with trauma and images of nightmares, sexual suppression and violence.

The search includes all manner of bizarre experiences, a motel manager who fills bottles of milk with her own breast milk (and an experience of a Cow Demon along the way), transvestite café staff, local yahoos and reality and madness seem to mix together. When at last Minami finds his friend, it seems he has been killed and pressed at a local car yard. Minami is startled to find someone has solved his problem for him, but this reprieve is short lived as he discovers Ozaki is still alive but has changed sex and become a vivacious woman!

At this stage the film has become more and more dreamlike, however, rather than being off-putting, you are slowly drawn into the madness of the film; the quirkiness of the characters and the non linear nature of the plot. We then enter truly Freudian territory, where Minami desires his partner Ozaki, who is now a woman but must save him/her from the boss.



The boss has erection problems and has to anally insert metal ladles in his rectum to achieve the results he desires and in a truly amazing scene Minami catches him with his pants down about to despoil Osaki and drives the ladle up his behind and electrocutes him ! He dies in both pleasure and pain in a messy climax.

Minami and Osaki then make love and he becomes locked, literally locked, in sexual union, he finds a hand within her vagina grasping his appendage. As he disentangles from Osaki, she slowly she gives birth to a full grown figure and it is Osaki as a man. The sexual variance of this scene is truly impressive, Minami and Osaki in homosexual embrace (Osaki is a woman but has identified as his brother i.e. male), give birth to Osaki as a male and the three go off into world together !!!

This is a strange, non linear surrealist film which is both unpredictable and entertaining. It is certainly not "traditional" Yakuza fare so be ready to experience some truly bizarre cinema. The strangeness of the plot, idiosyncrasies of the characters and sheer creativity pervarsity of much of this film makes it a must see experience.

Gravedancers

R4 DVD

Reel DVD

www.reeldvd.com.au

Gravedancers is a example of a film which shows lots of potential but is ultimately let down by the overuse of special effects and Hollywood gimmicks.



The film opens with a woman being killed by an unseen force, a bit like a scene from the film "the entity", she is dragged, beaten and let hanging. This sets the stage for what begins to develop as an interesting ghost story.

Three college friends reunite to say goodbye to an old pal and after the funeral return to the graveyard to have a few drinks to have a private farewell. They are not the most likeable of characters, a heavy drinker/stone Sid, a yuppie lawyer (Harris) recently married and his ex girlfriend Kira who at one time was his stalker !

As they celebrate their friend's life Sid finds a strange note with a poem called the Gravedancers lament. He reads the note aloud and they join in its message of live life to the full by dancing on some graves. After that everything changes.

What follows is, for quite a while, a solid ghost story. There are subtle signs of haunting, opening doors, knocks and sounds and an excellent edgy mood is created, this first section of the film seems to be marked by less is more, if only that cautious filmmaking continued ! The first appearance of the ghost to Harris and his wife is harrowing and well presented.

The storyline unfolds well - when Sid calls in paranormal investigators they find that the Gravedancers lament has more than once verse and while the one they read celebrated life, the next verse was a curse. It seems they have a fortnight to live and with each day the paranormal activity get worse. The haunting begins to increase in intensity until Kira is brutally attacked.

The paranormal investigators in tow they return to the graveyard to discover the names of the graves they desecrated. They discover that they are haunted by three ghosts, the ones whose graves they danced on. A young pyromaniac who died young after setting a fire and killing his family and himself, a women who killed her lover and his wife with an axe and a judge who tortured, killed and sexually abused women in his basement. A motley crew to say the least, who'd realize that the graves you just happen to dance on are all such psychopaths !!



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Sad to say as the intensity of the haunting progress the subtlety of the earlier segments of the film are overtaken with an orgy of special effects which are way over the top. While the ghost shown earlier is impressive, later we get very "Hollywood" looking ghosts which do not scare or frighten at all but just look rather silly. As the plot progresses we get to the stage when a fence (!) wraps itself around the house and the special effects reach fever pitch and all level of common sense goes out the window. The climax when a large face comes out in a blue cloud and a giant hand tries to take Harris back to the grave are more comic book than ghost story.

This is a film which showed an immense amount of promise, it has an interesting plot which was different to many other ghost stories, the gravedancers lament was a very nice twist and the interactions between the main characters added to the texture of the story. However, the overuse of special effects and the need to go way over the top in the final half an hour destroyed most of the suspense built up earlier in the film.

Gravedancers is fun to watch, but really is a movie which showed great promise and lost its way.

Gruesome
Madman Entertainment
R4 DVD
www.madman.com.au



What if every day you relived your own torture and murder?

In the gripping and brutal film, college student Claire Parker (Lauren Currie Lewis) gets a ride home one night and finds herself in the clutches of a psychotic madman, Duke. Duke is not a simply madman but a brutal serial killer and he violently attacks Claire and dragging her to the basement tortures and kills her. At least, that is how it seems, because Claire wakes up and finds she is still very much alive. She assumes it was a bad dream, but is haunted by the vividness of the experience. Again and again, she experiences memories of her supposed death but these seem to not only reveal her own demise, but that of her boyfriend and the killing of Duke by the police.

Gruesome is a very intelligent horror film which while certainly delivering on the violence and gore scale, focuses on the distortion of memory, dreams and reflections. It is a film which deliberately plays with the viewer. Is this a violent version of "Ground Hog Day" where life is repeated day after day, or is it something more. If it is simply Claire remembering the day of her death, why can she see the capture of the killer and other seemingly unrelated events. Why do the events change and the story replay in different versions.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the film is how different "versions" of Claire's murder are revealed, the story varies greatly, but whatever she does, no matter how different, it seems to lead to the same place with the same brutally inevitable results.

This is a relatively low budget film which while using some powerfully violent episodes primarily uses character development and plot to provide a superb horror experience. It is not until the very last moments of the film that you realize what has been really occurring, while there are a few hints here and there it is only in retrospect they make sense.

I highly recommend Gruesome it shows what can be done with a small budget and some

creativity, rather than relying on old horror clichés or over the top special effects, it uses character, mood and plot to achieve a high level of tension. This is a film which takes us on a terrifying ride and offers enough twists and turns that it keeps you on the edge of your seat right the way through.

While we saw this as a preview, , the official release will include such Special Features as a Director's Commentary, a Theatrical Trailer and a Stills Gallery.

**Halloween:
The Director's Cut
Director: Rob Zombie
Roadshow
R4 DVD**

The choice of Rob Zombie to remake Halloween was a brave one, his approach to music and film-making tends to polarize audiences and this is much the same with Halloween, you will either rave about it or hate it. To be honest I was never a fan of Rob Zombie, until now.

In my own humble opinion I think Halloween is a masterful achievement, it has brought up to date a classic horror/slasher film and given it a depth which was not found in the original.

This, of course, is a controversial opinion; the original Halloween is held in high esteem and worshipped by cult film addicts. I certainly agree the original was a great film and was highly effective for its time, but I should emphasize the end phrase, for its time. There were various follow-on films but nothing truly revolutionary. Today the original films are clearly outdated and a new version of the myth was needed that could breathe new life into the story of Michael Myer and I believe this film does so. There have been complaints about the brutality and certainly this is a brutal, vicious and violent film, but the myth of Michael Myer was always just that.

The slow development of the background to how Michael Myer becomes a killer is powerful and the depiction of a dysfunctional family is unflinching and at times painful to watch.



The consistent process of feeling empathy for a disturbed child (and then adult) and then repulsion for his violent rage is what provides the film with a visceral emotional impact.

The way in which the film explains the way the psyche of a killer develops is impressive and I especially liked Malcolm McDowell as the psychiatrist.

There are lots of little touches that helps make this a highly successful film. I think the exploration of the nature of masks is interesting. The way in which the young Myers kills with the same mask which will later become his signature is meaningful, as is the fact that though he is a child, it is an adult sized mask – it is as though the underlying message is that through this act of killing his is branded for life, the mask has stuck, he cannot escape.

The mask in this version of Halloween also has a more “Frankenstein” look which emphasizes the fact that he is a product of the environment around him. He is a boogeyman, a collective zeitgeist of the dysfunction in which he developed. This “social” background to the Myer legend is far more developed in this film and this gives the character far more depth. Certainly, in some way, it removes the mystery of the legend but also humanizes the character which makes it even more confronting, the viewer regularly identified with both the killer (as victim) and the victim (as another form of victim) and hence this makes Halloween a very confronting experience.

While certainly the sheer ferocity of the films violence cannot be underplayed, I do not believe it can necessarily be simply seen as gratuitous as some reviewers have claimed.



The original film was violent and the only reason it's violence was limited was due to the time and social context in which it was made. I believe that if the original Halloween had been made today it would have been just as violent, that's the nature of the present day, regardless of whether we like it or not. To make this film "real" requires a certain higher level of emotional and physical violence than the original and I believe it utilizes these in a creative way to great effect. To understand the nature of Michael Myers we must appreciate the violence that created him, the violence around him and, of course, the resulting violence of his actions.

It is too easy to see the original film through some sort of nostalgic fantasy, remembering smooching in a drive-in, while forgetting the originally furor caused by such films. Slashers were highly controversial in their time as this film is today. Just like the original this film breaks new ground and pushes "the edge of the envelope" to get the desired effect.

This is an intelligent, powerful and confronting adaption of a classic horror film, it offers it's own innovative version of the Michael Mystery mythos and mixes suspense, violence and a truly bleak view of the world to create a unique film experience.

Special Features:

Audio Commentary by Writer/Director Rob Zombie
Alternate Ending
Re-Imagining Halloween documentary
Conversation with Rob Zombie featurette
Meet the Cast featurette
Screen Tests
Bloopers and more!

The Hunt for the HMAS Sydney **DV1 Productions** **Director: Mathew Kelly** **Narrated by Colin Friels** **R4 DVD**



Reviewer: Bob Estreich

The disappearance of HMAS Sydney in the early days of World War 2 was (and still is) Australia's greatest naval disaster. How could a modern cruiser just disappear without a trace of crew, wreckage, or oil slick? The inevitable conspiracy theories arose about Government cover-ups, Japanese submarines (Japan had not entered the War at this point) and survivors being machine gunned in the water. This documentary covers the disappearance, the discovery of the wreck in early 2008, and the human cost of such a loss.

Australian coastal shipping was being plagued by German commerce raiders at the time. These were merchant ships armed with heavy guns and sent into enemy waters to harass shipping. A small fleet of raiders was working its way around the Australian coastline, with considerable success. One, the Kormoran, had already sunk ten ships.

The HMAS Sydney was recalled from active duty in the Mediterranean to hunt down the raiders. Its Captain, Joseph Burnett, had some battle experience from the Mediterranean while Sydney was part of a British fleet, but had no experience operating a ship as a single unit. He also had no knowledge of commerce raider tactics.

In the afternoon of 19th November 1941 Sydney met the Kormoran off the Western Australian coast. Kormoran continued to act as a merchantman, even sending out radio signals that it was being followed by an unknown warship.

Sydney approached cautiously with her forward guns trained on Kormoran, which continued to move northwards. Eventually Sydney moved partly abreast of Kormoran to identify her, and this put her in range of Kormoran's hidden guns. A short but savage engagement followed. Sydney quickly lost its bridge and gunnery controls to the accurate German fire

and its decks were raked by German small-calibre guns. A torpedo hit Sydney near the bows and she veered off to disengage. Kormoran was also badly damaged and eventually her sailors took to the lifeboats and made their way to the Australian coast. The last they saw of Sydney, she was strongly ablaze and heading southeast.

Since then, a number of groups have tried to find the wreck. In 2007 funds were raised for another attempt, and research began. David Mearns, the search director, deserves all due credit for a brilliant piece of thorough research. His investigation took heavy note of the German accounts of the battle, and included finding a secret minute-by-minute account of the battle kept by the Kormoran's captain, Dettmers, during his period as a prisoner of war. Mearns was able to pin down an area of the Indian Ocean where he expected to find the Kormoran, and from this he would try to locate the Sydney. It worked, and on 12th March 2008 the search ship found the wreck of Kormoran after two weeks searching. Using this as a starting point, the wreck of Sydney was found four days later.

In spite of the success of the search and the euphoria of the search ship's crew at the discovery, Mearns reminds them that this is the grave of 645 seamen. The documentary covers the human trauma of the loss, including Mrs Flores – she was married for only a few hours before her husband was recalled to HMAS Sydney. She never saw her new husband again. The loss hit many families hard, especially since the Sydney's fate was unknown. The conspiracy theories did not help. Finally these people have found out what happened, and know where their loved ones now rest.

The documentary's producers have unearthed a surprising amount of good-quality footage of the Sydney, considering that she was a warship, in wartime, and such film would generally be regarded as secret. A well-presented booklet gives details of Sydney, including an excellent four-page foldout drawing of the ship and many poignant underwater photos of the wreckage. The only part missing is the result of the Commission of Enquiry that will be set up later this year. With the evidence presented in the documentary, supported by the underwater photos, it really makes the enquiry a foregone conclusion.

The mystery of HMAS Sydney is finally put to rest.

Special Features:

Extras
Extended interviews and footage
Discovery photo gallery
Historical photo gallery and selected archive material
Booklet

Inglorious Bastards

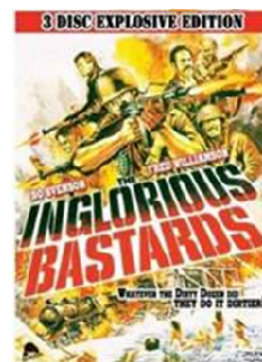
Director:

Enzo G. Castellari

3 Disc Explosive Ed.

Severin Films

Inglorious Bastards was the alternate title for the Italian adventure - war tale Counterfeit Commandos.



Bo Svenson (star of the original Walking Tall films) stars as Robert Yeager, an American army pilot who has gone AWOL once too often, it seems he likes to take his plane to see his girlfriend every so often ! He finds himself with a group of misfits and criminals on their way to the stockade, however, due to a twist of fate and some timely German bombing, they escape and find themselves trying to make their way to the Swiss Border. However, things are never as they seem, after capturing a German soldier who is also AWOL and sick of the war, they think they have an easy path to freedom. Due to an error in judgement, after nearing getting killed by a group of sexy naked German babes, they kill what seem to be a team of German soldiers. Sadly they are actually resistance fighters in disguise. Inevitability drives them to take the resistance fighters place and embark on a dangerous mission for the French underground.

The first half of this action packed thriller is focused on the "build-up" and the AWOL soldiers attempt to gain freedom, while the second half gears up to the secret mission with killings every second, twists and turns and every possible disaster than can be packed into the film's running time.

This is a classic cult action film which brings together motifs from every possible war film, action and thriller, there is even a sub theme



about racial tensions and the futility of war ! While some may argue director Enzo G. Castellari has simply made a pastiche of many different war dramas, I think this misses the point. This is clearly meant to be a fast paced, action film, which is so over the top to make it a deliberate caricature of traditional war films.

Severin have done a truly remarkable job on the print of this film. It offers superb colours, a clear picture and excellent contrast. The audio is terrific with lots of explosive noise and surround sound but clear enough that the dialogue is easy to follow.

While Severin always works hard on their DVDs, the extras for this package are above even their normal high standard; in a word they are exceptional. The three DVD edition includes an incredible range of content:

A commentary by director Enzo G. Castellari

A conversation with Quentin Tarantino and Enzo G. Castellari which offers all sorts of interesting reflections and discussions including info on Quentin Tarantino's remake.

Documentary: Train Kept-A-Rollin' – this is a superb documentary also sorts of background on the process of making Inglorious Bastards, the Italian film industry of the time and war films in general.

Featurette: Back to the War Zone with Castellari covers the locations used in the film.

A theatrical trailer

Soundtrack CD of the music by Francesco De Masi, even though only a limited amount of the complete soundtrack survives, Severin has included what is available.

The byline of Inglorious bastards is "Whatever the Dirty Dozen did, they do it dirtier!" and that about sums it up.

This is a superb action, war fantasy romp filled to the brim with shoot outs, unlikely escapes and rescues and an explosive climax, presented in an ultimate 3 DVD edition !

What more could we want ?

Jan Svankmajer's Faust Siren Visual R4 DVD



Faust (aka Fautus) is the major character of a classic German tale involving a pact with the devil. In the earliest tales Doctor Faust has studied studiously through the theological sciences but not found the answers he seeks. He refuses the theological path and instead decides to follow the path of human knowledge, science and medicine. As the story transforms through history, we find Faust making a pact with the devil in exchange for the scientific and medical knowledge he requires. In many ways this represents the Churches early attempts to reign in the scientific and secular worldviews which were beginning to develop during this period by demonising the search for knowledge outside "the sanction of the Church".



Classic Rembrandt Painting of Faust



The Faust legend has been adapted by a wide range of artists in many different fields such as Christopher Marlowe, Mikhail Bulgakov, Thomas Mann, Hector Berlioz, Franz Liszt, Washington Irving, Gustav Mahler and Goethe.

An early popular adaptation of the story was by Christopher Marlow in his stage play *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*. This was further refined by Goethe some two centuries later into the most classic Faustus tale where an intellectual dissatisfied with all human knowledge and the limits of human experience makes a pact with the devil in order to come to a true and complete knowledge of the universe.

The word Faustus means lucky and refers to the fact that in some of the tales, Faust tricks the devil out of taking him to hell, or, in the Goethe version, God intervenes to save his soul just in time.

While in some modern takes on the story Faust has tended to be more of a sensation seeker wishing for all the pleasures the world can offer in return for his soul, the earlier tales tended to emphasize Faust's search for wisdom and this is what Svankmajer tends to follow in his innovative adaptation of the tale.

Svankmajer's adaptation of the Faustus tale is nothing short of astounding. He creates a tale using three different levels of storytelling; the modern day "physical world", a theatrical retelling of the legend of Faust and a "real" Faust story being played out using the other two layers of the presentation.

This mixture of three different "paradigms" is breathtaking and creates a truly remarkable experience. Using one of the Czech Republic's most respected actors, Peter Cepek, he



tells the tale of an ordinary man, bored and dour who is drawn into a theatrical presentation of Faustus where he ends up playing the lead role. Regardless of his attempts to escape, the "play" recaptures him, manipulating him back into the lead role.

The play injects itself into his reality - props appearing, backdrops being revealed from nowhere, puppets suddenly sprouting dialogue and when he does think he has escaped back into his own world, often it is into the reality of Faust rather than his own he has arrived in.

But it is not just that he has been manipulated into participating in a theatrical performance. The more he plays Faustus he more he becomes Faustus, until finally, it becomes his "reality" and as he acts out the scene where Metistopheles is evoked, he actually calls Metistopheles into his "world" and signs a contract with him. Here we have an amazing mixture of mediums with full sized marionettes, miniature puppets, real actors and animation all rolled into one incredible scene !

This fascinating way of presenting Faustus is made even more textured by the use of real actors, claymation, animation, puppets and marionettes (some of which are full sized).

The whole film is suffused with a dark surrealism and each reality melds into the other. At times, the main character is human, at another, he is literally turned into a full sized marionette !

The line between the modern world (outside), the theatrical world and the world in which the Faust tale is authentically true is constantly warped so that it is impossible tell what is real and this makes this film quite unique.

There are lots of truly bizarre moments including the lovemaking scene where Faust is seduced by a beautiful woman, whom he discovers after having consummated his lust rather passionately, is actually a marionette with a wooden orifice; and that's not the worst of it, she is actually the devil in disguise !

The whole film has a sense of decay, ranging from the choice of old buildings and collapsing ramshackle sites to time lapse photography of rotting fruit. It is hard to describe the mood of the film—the real world seems depicted as a place of poverty, stupidity and ineptitude and the other worlds are brimming with decay, death and destruction and absolutely nothing is as it seems.

At times it is as though the use of marionettes reinforces the idea that as human beings we have no real sense of free will and are just pawns of circumstance and desire. This, of course, is taken even further when Faustus himself moves in and out of being a marionette.

The subjectivity of the various roles in the film are also explored via similar transformations. For example, Metistopheles regularly transforms from being a puppet to a claymation figure to being a form of Faustus himself. Hence we may suggest that Svankmajer is also indicating a possible “psychological” interpretation of the legend and this of course comes back to the central motif where real life is intertwined with the theatrical presentation of the Faustus play.

It is also intriguing that he constantly uses Elizabethan costumes and this, for me anyway, reminds me of that famous Shakespearean quote...

“All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts..”

This, in many ways, reflects the way in which Svankmajer intertwines the various stories, motifs and characters within this film.

I do not think I have ever seen such an unusual and innovative film with so many different levels of storytelling and using so many different techniques. It is disturbing, a little creepy and definitely odd.

Jan Svankmajer's *Faust* offers us a uniquely surreal cinematic retelling of a classic work of literature and is a must see work of World Cinema.

The Australian release from Siren is a solid high quality release.

Demir Pence Korsan Adam
Iron Claw the Pirate
Onar Films
www.onarfilms.com



Director Cetin Inanc is a favourite among cult cinema aficionados; he created unique low budget Turkish films in every possible genre and even today continues to make TV productions in Turkey. His earliest films (around 1969-1971) were erotic Turkish films but after pressure from Turkish censors he moved onto Western and Action films. Some of his most revered films are his super hero films which bring together lots of action, girls, executions and evil masked enemies. *Iron Claw the Pirate* is one of his earliest super hero films made years before “*Vahsi Kan*, The man who saves the world” which made him a household name in Turkey. Most of his films are best considered low budget, strong on action and fairly short on character development and plot, indeed Inanc is known as “Jet” in Turkish cinema circles due to the short time it takes him to churn out a film!

Iron Claw the Pirate is a very rare film and once again Onar has done a sterling job bringing it to DVD, considering the age of the film it is a pretty damn good transfer with only minor problems and they are only a few scotches here and there. The sound is very clear and the music rather cool. As with most Onar films it is a limited run, this time of 500 copies so collectors need to get in quick.

Iron Claw the Pirate begins with a great 1960's mood, there is the smooth jive of a Jazz band playing in the background and a sexy girl dancing to the music. As soon as the mood is established we receive our introduction to the villain. Strangely masked villain Fantomas sends a video message to his henchman Be-

-hacet and his army of secret agents. He informs them that he will soon return to Istanbul to re-establish his crime empire and deal with nemesis Iron Claw.

At the same time we are introduced to the hero, Iron Claw. In a meaningful scene Iron Claw is handed a gun by "the Uncle" and told that this weapon is to be used to destroy not only Fantomas, but all evil guys. Iron Claw wears a strange "Batman" like outfit and has a rather nice motor bike to complete his image, he not only has a sexy offsider (a female "Robin") but works hand in hand with the local police.

As the film unfolds, we get treated to a subplot about a gang war between the local mafia and the Fantoma crime empire and things get complex with stories of microfilm and secret weapons, sabotage and betrayal.

Of course, as things get heated, Iron Claw saves the day, but never before lots of people are shot and killed and as much fisticuffs as each scene can allow. Iron Claw seems to be a successful hero but only at a great cost, the climax of the film seems to involve a vast number of Villains shot, stabbed and killed, it seems Fantomas must be stopped at any cost !

Iron Claw is a surprisingly fun film, obviously made on a low budget but packed with shootings, beatings, fisticuffs and sexy babes doing erotic dancing. The subtitles are well, rather strange, and at times make the film far more amusing than was originally intended, but this just adds to its cult movie status.

For a low budget film it is rather well filmed with nice locations and some modicum of style, I especially like the scene where the camera slowly glides down through a cross section of a building showing the fights on each level and finally as it reaches the bottom all the heroes meet to head into the next battle.

Iron Claw is not only a rather enjoyable romp but comes with some rather impressive extras. The major one is a documentary on director Cetin Inanc. This is hosted by Cetin Inanc fan club member Gokay Gelgec, who gives us an extensive overview of the director's career - from earliest releases through his major Turkish cinema successes to his

later work on TV shows. The documentary opens with a great selection of wild action scenes from various Inanc films and these are continued throughout, it runs for about 30 minutes and really helps put Iron Claw into context.

In addition, there is a stills gallery of images, including some original theatrical poster art and lobby cards as well as filmographies and biographies for Karahan and Gencer.

There are also a selection of trailers.

An added bonus is the poster included with the DVD.

**Laughing Matters...
The Men!**
Ariztical Entertainment
R1 DVD
www.ariztical.com



"While some gay comics seek to refute common stereotypes, others thrive on them."

All Movie Guide

Laughing Matters...The Men explores how gay comedians take the stereotypes of modern life and use them as a path to empowerment and to raucous humour.

The six comedians included are quite astounding artists who not only are highly respected within the comedy community but have tales to tell of their own personal journeys, ranging from coming out tales to the loss of AIDS, life as an Asian American to the experiences of a openly effeminate gay playwright.

Laughing Matters...The Men! Was shot in five days at the Palm Springs Gay Pride Festival and includes a good balance of stand up material with interviews, life-stories and scenes from the gay parade.

This is the third in a series of award-winning comedy films from All Out Films and all have proved highly successful.

Each of the comedians has their personal take on comedy. We meet Scott Kennedy, a self-proclaimed "pink-neck" from Texas with his own Comedy Central special who seems just

like any Texan however he is also openly gay and takes with the experience of one who have experienced loss (his lover died of AIDS), at the other end of the spectrum we experience the stories and memories of two-time Emmy winner Bruce Vilanch (Outstanding Writing, The 63rd Annual Academy Awards), who has written for everyone from Bett Midlar to Cher.

We get to hear from Bob Smith who helped found Gay comedy in America and was the first gay comic to ever appear on The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson and from Alec Mapa, an "Ugly Betty" and "Desperate Housewives" regular whose experiences as an Asian American make his journey in multiple communities even more humorous and revealing.

Others tell of their tales as African or Jewish American's and how each deal with their own communities reaction to Gay life and it is from these life experience that their stand up develops.

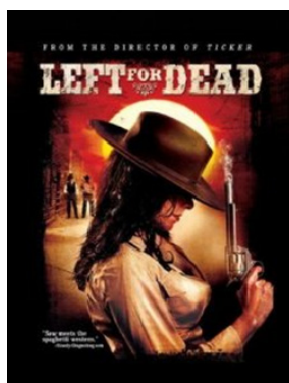
There are six comedians in all and this is a superbly funny, moving and entertaining DVD.

Left for Dead Anchor Bay R4 DVD

Albert Pyun is a well known B Grade Hawaiian filmmaker who has directed a wide range of B Grade films including Radioactive Dreams, Cyborg, Captain America and even Kickboxer 4 !

He trained under the legendary Akira Kurosawa is most noted for being able to squeeze dramatic cinematography into otherwise low budget productions and this is much the case with Left for Dead. Left for Dead was shot in Argentina with a predominately Spanish-speaking cast and crew and to be honest there seems to be a lot lost in translation as well.

This is a film with an interesting premise, a



sort of western meets ghost horror story, but it seems to be very high on gloss and low on substance. It has the feel of a long MTV music clip, the film editing style is quirky with a regular use of freeze frame, however, most annoying is the soundtrack seems way too loud for the dialogue and a lot of the dialogue is in Spanish with no sub titles ! It could also be said that much of the dialogue that is in English has such a heavy accent that you miss it anyway !

The story of Left for Dead is rather fun.

A preacher leaves his whore (this film seems to have a thing for using the word whore over and over again!). In fury and despair she and her "girls" and go on a rampage killing everyone in the township of Amnesty, down to the last woman and child. Why this occurs is hard to say ? Lots of women have lousy lovers or partners but they do not usually slaughter a whole town if they leave them, if they did, the world would be a much less populated place !

Anyway, back to the story, the preacher (Mobius) asks the devil to make him immortal so he can return to gain revenge, his wish is granted and he roams the streets of the abandoned town waiting his time. Until 15 years later.

Blake is on the run from bounty hunters and a group of woman who are seeking revenge after his has impregnated two of them and then made a runner. The women are a very bizarre bunch led by a man hating prophet Mary and all seem to be on a crusade to destroy "man – kind", they even have their own man only town which is ruled by Mary with an iron fist.

They enter Amnesty to find him and the carnage starts. Left for Dead had lots of potential, the plot is a strange mixture of spaghetti western and a ghost and horror tale and the special effects are nicely done. The plot however leaves a lot to be desired and there is some real issues here with "whores" and revenge !!

Even if we ignore the weakness of the plot and that is asking a lot, the filming style makes it top heavy with lots of meaningful freeze frames and creative editing and hence you end up with lots of froth but nothing underneath. After a while all the "profound" film style becomes annoying because it is masking a lack of content.

While I only had a promotional DVD (and it may be different on the full release), there was lots of Spanish dialogue without subtitles and the mix had the soundtrack way too loud and it drowned out what dialogue was in English and even then the actors had accents which made you constantly wonder what was said, couple this with a plot which has holes so big you can drive a truck through and the whole thing becomes nonsensical. (US reviewers seem to note that sub titles are on the Spanish dialogue but that at times it is nonsensical and even duplicates what has been just said in English !!)

Left for Dead ended up like a long music video clip, flash, brazen, some interesting scenes here and there, but not substantial enough for a full length film.

London to Brighton

Director:

Paul Andrew Williams.

Siren Visual

R4 DVD

Web: <http://www.sirenvisual.com.au>

At 3:07AM, Joanne (Georgia Groome) is in a sleazy public toilet somewhere in London. Joanne, who is an 11 year old runaway, is washing lipstick off her face and crying uncontrollably whilst Kelly (Lorraine Stanley), a prostitute, attempts to console her. Kelly's face is bruised and battered.

They have just left the home of Duncan Allen (Alexander Morton), a rich man with a penchant for young girls, who lies dying in a pool of blood in his bathroom. It seems he got more than he bargained for when he attempted to purchase Joanne's favours.

Duncan's son, Stuart Allen (Sam Spruell), a sociopathic local criminal finds his dying father and is none too impressed. He wants answers and..... revenge.

He sends his thugs out to visit Derrick (Johnny Harris) for information and when Derrick explains he supplied Duncan Allen with a child prostitute he wants to know where the child and her minder is.

Kelly and Joanne know they are in trouble and board a train to Brighton in an attempt to escape and the story begins.

This is an impressive first film from a previously unknown director, Paul Andrew Williams. It was made on a low budget with unknown actors and funded by a grant from UK lotteries. It just shows what can be done with a superb script and innovative filmmaking.



It is even more surprising when we note that London to Brighton received numerous awards with the director winning a BAFTA for the most promising upcoming director in the industry.

London to Brighton is not a comfortable viewer experience; it explores the underbelly of London's criminals and pimps where everything is for sale. It offers a fairly straight forward if not harrowing journey of Kelly and Joanne trying to escape while at the same time developing a bond of friendship. While at the same time we slowly see "flashbacks" of the disastrous events which have led them to where they are.

Its unflinching portrayal of how hard choices can lead to terrible consequences is painful and disturbing.

This is a powerful film with superb cinematography, a moody and dark soundtrack and a story which will haunt you for a long time.

Extras include:

Deleted Scenes

Georgia Groom Audition

Q&A

Behind the Scenes featurette

Director's Commentary.



Maniac
William Lustig
Umbrella Ent.
R4 DVD
Single DVD or part of
the Video Nasties
DVD Collection.



Maniac is the tale of Frank Zito (Joe Spinell), a clearly disturbed dude. He was severely mentally and physically abused as a child by his prostitute mother and now lives alone in a desolate part of New York. His apartment is a reflection of his own fractured psyche and is filled with mannequins decorated with clothes, jewelry and hair he has brutally scalped from his victims !

Frank is confused about what he wants, he hates his mother for leaving him, both alone at night as a child as she worked the streets and through her death in a car accident, yet also loves her and cannot let go. His view of women hence matches his delusion, he wants woman to mother him and yet when he sees them as “sexual” beings he has the uncontrollable urge to kill them. To preserve the “ideal” image he has of women he recreates them in forms he can control and manipulate, he does this by collecting items from them and creating mannequins with their hair to represent them.

His killings are brutal and intense, this is not a film for the faint of heart, since he kills on impulse and cannot control his urges, the killings are explosive, violent and explicit. There are some incredible chase sequences which will bring your heart right up into your throat, the scene in the graveyard is impressive, but nothing compares to the “hunt” through the railway underground.

You experience the scene through the eyes of the victim and feel ever move she takes to evade the killer, the end to the chase is equally terrifying.

One of the stranger juxtapositions is when Frank meets a fashion photographer Anna D'Antoni (Caroline Munro). At first it seems he is more fascinated with her photography and the way it “freezes” a person beyond time (hence beyond them leaving or dying) then her.



He then begins to date her yet in a very staid and nearly platonic manner. At the same time he kills one of her models and continuing his violent rampage.

On one level, his relationship with Anna D'Antoni looks as though it is his attempt to develop a more “sane” aspect of himself, but of course, this all comes crashing down when they visit his mother's grave and his insanity intrudes once again. He loses control, violently attacking her but for the first time in the film, the woman escapes and this ultimately leads to a final scene of madness in which he stabs himself and is discovered by the police.

Throughout the film we switch between the perspectives of the victims and Frank himself. We constantly hear his heavy, laboured breathing and in various hallucinations, ranging from his mother returning from the grave and a graphic depiction of his victims dismembering him, we see the world the way he does. While this is certainly a splatter film and was denounced as a “video nasty” at the time of its release, it does attempt to explore the psychological mindset of a man who is both a killer and a tormented child locked with him struggling with the scars of abuse.

The special effects are confronting and frighteningly real, Tom Savini did an incredible job and some of the killings, such as the rifle blasts in the car are hard to watch without flinching. It is quite a tribute to Savini that some 28 years later the killings in Maniac still have a visceral effect on those who see it.

For some years this was a key film caught up within the Video Nasty controversy, it was banned in many countries and heavily edited in others, it was denounced by misogynist by

by some and is still subject to much controversy.

In Australia it was originally banned in 1981 and only released in censored editions later, this is the first uncensored and complete edition released.



Umbrella has released a nice package including lots of extras. There is an interesting audio commentary with William Lustig, Tom Savini, Lorenzo Marinelli and Luke Walter, a radio interview with William Lustig, a documentary called "The Joe Spinell Story", TV Spots, a gallery of outrage, still and poster gallery and trailers.

It is available as a single DVD release or as part of Umbrella's great value Video Nasties set which also includes such other notable shockers as The Last House on the Left and Basket Case.

Man, Woman and the Wall Ricochet Releasing (TLA) R1 DVD

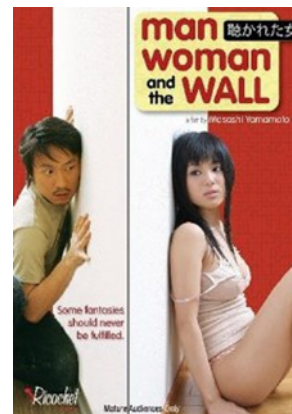
Man, Woman and the Wall is a very strange man meets girl sort of tale. It has a uniquely voyeuristic twist and each of the major male protagonists seem distinctly self obsessed and locked with fantasy. It seems the major choice of sexuality here is voyeurism mixed with masturbation and this geekish "sex romp" offers us a strange set of characters.

Ryou, a young reporter for "an old-fashioned magazine," moves into a new apartment and after bragging how lucky he is to at last have an apartment with a bath, he realizes the walls are paper thin and you can hear everything, and I mean, everything that happens in the next unit. He soon develops a fantasy life with the woman next door, one he has never met. He visualizes her apartment and what she must look like and enjoys a rather solo sex life based on these fantasies.

The movie is clearly focused on male heterosexual sexual fantasy and seems to be filmed from Ryou's perspective. This focus is rein-

forced by using Aoi Sola – a hardcore Japanese star as the Satsuki, the female focus of his attention.

His obsession reaches what we may see as stalking level; he has structured his day around her schedule, found out where she works and arranged to bump into her at every occasion. He has attached a listening device to her wall and steals her rubbish to see what she eats. He doesn't come across as an especially likeable character, rather obsessive, neurotic and maybe a bit disturbed. Yet, he is the milder of the two male characters !



Satsuki is receiving constantly harassing phone calls; they are accelerating in intensity and seem to be becoming threats. Every time she gets one of these calls she phones her boyfriend Yuta whom arrives to have rough sex with her. It seems Yuta is also a bit strange, he sustains a distant relationship with her and intimacy only seems to occur when she has been frightened by one of these calls and it is usually simply an excuse for a hard night of sex. He seems genuinely excited by her fear and terror.

As the perverted bidding war increases, Ryou sneaks into her apartment to find why his listening devices isn't working and finds that her boyfriend has installed his own listening devices and a hidden camera. This is quite a bizarre scene, we have two voyeurs battling it out, vying for control of listening devices !

So now we have a bizarre scenario evolving where both characters are seemingly disturbed stalkers and I cannot see how either of them are likeable at all. Sure, we may identify with a little bit of voyeurism here and there, but the extent to which both characters go clearly is "unstable" territory and has moved from a simple lustful voyeurism to dangerous obsession.

Ryou follows Yuta and finds he monitors Satsuki, masturbating over the fear she experiences after he makes abusive calls.



Australia), that many directors have begun to explore themes with political, religious and social significance within the horror genre.

The first episode in this six DVD set is Family and is certainly a multi-layered tale. The atmosphere created in the first few minutes of the film as the camera glides through the street and into Harold's home is that of domestic bliss and safe suburban living at its most banal. It is coupled with gospel music (used throughout the episode) to emphasize the stifling conservative and suburban mood.

As the camera focuses in on Harold's basement you realize all is not as it seems, he is stripping flesh from the bones of an old man! Harold seems strangely normal; friendly, amicable and interested in family and yet he has "replaced" his family with strangers he has picked off the street, killed, stripped off their flesh and turned into skeletons.

Soon a couple move in next door. They seem young and friendly but a little lost. They become friends with Harold after accidentally running into his letterbox with their car after a few drinks in a local bar. They invite him to dinner and reflect on the death of their daughter from cancer some time before and discuss the fact that they are "starting again" in this new, family friendly township.

They, however, are not what they seem on the surface either, they too have a strangely dysfunctional family, they cannot move on and have another child until they have caught and punished the killer of their child and the plan they have to do this is brutal.

It seems their child did not die of cancer but was murdered; indeed, she was murdered by Harold and has become the "skeletal" daughter in his family.

As these two "families" collide there are lots of twists and turns and an exploration of the

dark underbelly of "family values". Indeed as David and Celia finally gain their revenge on Harold and celebrate the fact that they can now move on and have a family, you realize they have become what he is and everyone has been poisoned by revenge. Both families are indeed as violent and disturbed as each other.

This is certainly a powerful and surprising episode and a great way to open the new series.

The Black Cat is a classic Edgar Allan Poe tale and it is marvelous to see it brought up to date by Stuart Gordon with Jeffrey Coombs superbly playing Poe. The story has been reworked by Gordon to bring in various aspects of Poe's life and emphasize the thin line between genius and madness.

The sparse use of special effects only highlights the violence and emphasizes the psychological nature of the tale and the strength of the plot.

There have been many versions of The Black Cat and this is one of the most masterful to date. It is great to see a period piece within the MOH series, Coombs is made up perfectly to look like Poe and the sets really create the mood and environment of the time in which Poe lived superbly. It is certainly a change of pace from episode one but is an enjoyable and intelligent piece of horror cinema.

Dario Argento is considered by many to be "the" Master of Horror, *Suspria* is still considered the very best horror film of all time and his various euro crime classics are still best sellers on DVD. I was intrigued to see what he would do in a 55 minute time span and what he produces is nothing short of breath-taking.

Pelts certainly rackets up the violence and gore content from the episodes thus far; it is confronting, bloody and visceral.

At times it is difficult to keep looking at the screen when people are placing their faces in raccoon traps, sewing their eyes and lips shut and skinning themselves!

The film has the trademark "look" of Argento with superb cinematography and a distinctive use of colour and texture, as well as a superb Claudio Simonetti "Goblin" like soundtrack.



The story is adapted from a F. Paul Wilson short story and is really an anti fur morality tale, though not in a didactic way but in the form of a horror genre tale. Two hicks are looking for the ultimate furs to sell and sneak onto a strange woman's land to trap what seem to be a unique type of raccoon.

On one level this is a truly over the top horror tale, the pelts are of course cursed and whoever works on them are driven to do to themselves what they have done of the pelts. The results are not pretty to say the least.

At the same time this tale have many levels of meaning and Argento is also exploring the way in which our modern society depersonalizes and reduces everything to flesh. The fur trader as a symbol of modern life not only uses animals as commodities but abuses his workers and sees woman as extensions of his own pleasure.

Accordingly, Pelts is a fascinating story which is saturated with lust, violence and revenge and offers a highly original Argento Masters of Horror episode.

The Screwfly Solution by Joe Dante is a true cross genre tale which spans the divide between horror, science fiction and psychology. It begins with the discussion of the eradication of the Screwfly by Biologists Alan and Barney (Jason Priestley and Elliott Gould).

They have returned from South America where they have saved many lives by devising a genetic solution to the Screwfly problem by modifying its reproduction cycle which causes the males to become confused and aggressive towards the female, resulting in the abandonment of reproduction and the eradication of the species.



Bella (Linda Darlow), a close friend to both of them and an outspoken feminist and specialist health investigator, is called to Jacksonville Florida to investigate an outbreak of mass murder with some 1100 women dead and the number rising.

It seems hundreds of men are killing their wives, daughters and even random females in extreme and brutal attacks. A fundamentalist religious cult called Sons of Adam claims responsibility stating that they're carrying out God's will.

As Alan and Barney investigate what is occurring they find this is happening across the globe and follows a disease vector and hence the religious fervor is a symptom rather than a cause, but nobody wants to listen.

The military are too caught up in their own limited paradigm (driving by male machismo) and hence the disease and violence quickly spreads.

Everyone seems to want to blame the perceived enemy (Islamic extremists, cultists, spies etc) instead of trying to understand what is really happening.

This unsettling exploration of religion, sexuality and gender is quite powerful. For many years it has been thought that religious fundamentalism (perhaps even all religion) has a biological basis in sexual suppression. Indeed this theory can be traced right back to the early psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud.

Dante creatively takes this further to suggest a bio terrorist agent which distorts the male hormonal pattern to confuse sexuality and aggression and causes men to attack and kill women hence decimating the species.



While this science fiction motif is carried through to the climax when we come to understand that a female alien species has engineered the virus to cleanse earth of mankind, much like

Alan and Barney did with the Screwfly, it is also used as an allegory to explore gender, sexuality, violence against women, religious fundamentalism and related issues.

This is an audacious production with some confronting and powerful scenes, the “set pieces” will certainly make you sit up and take notice, the image of the priest wandering through the hospital Bible in one hand and scalpel in the other slitting women’s throats is not easily forgotten!

This is a thought provoking and daring episode which offers a superb cross genre horror/science fiction film with lots of subtexts and meanings.

Right to Die offers some fascinating twists on the euthanasia debate. As the film begins it seems to be a fairly straight forward tale of a terrible car accident, a wife left badly burned and a husband’s difficult decision.

But this is Masters of Horror, so clearly there is something else in play !

Slowly we come to appreciate the complexity of the situation as we learn of Cliff’s infidelity, Abby’s family money and the fact that her air-bag did not work and hence a large compensation may be payable.

Many of the characters are not as they seem, Abby’s mother while sounding high minded seems to be simply protecting her family wealth and the lawyer has dollars in his eyes.

As Cliff and Abby’s mother battle it out as to whether she should be kept alive, strange



things begin to occur, every time Abby “flat lines” her soul is set free and is able to wreck havoc on the living, especially Cliff.

Cliff now realizes he must keep her alive at all costs, since if she dies she will become an avenging spirit, since, as we come to realize near the end, Cliff was the one who burnt her alive.

The twists and turns in the tale are impressive and it is an intriguing plot which plays with our expectations, while others may want to keep Abby alive for religious reasons, Cliff’s anti-euthanasia stance is for his own protection. Of course this is a sharp criticism of those who real motive for keeping the ill alive to avoid their own emotional suffering, rather than from true compassion.

The climax of the film is notably grisly as he skins the young assistant with whom he had an affair in the vain hope her skin will save Abby’s life, but alas, she has already died and is waiting at home for him - his torment has just begun.

Pro Life is an impressive climax to this season of Masters of Horror. It’s basic premise is that if we accept the Pro-Life argument and the child should be protected at all costs, even if the result of rape, what would happen if a child was fathered by a demon!





This may seem like a silly idea to the atheists and secularists among us, but since most proliferators are religious in orientation it is a fascinating “thought” experiment to undertake and Carpenter takes it to some amazing extremes.

The presentation of this tale is harrowing, Ron Perlman is terrifying as the religious extremist Dwayne with violence constantly brooding under the surface.

When it does erupt it is ferocious and horrifying and destroys his family as well as himself and many others.

The scene when he takes revenge on the clinic owner is truly shocking and suggests just how far extremism can take someone and its ramifications on all those who come in contact with it.

The family who come into the clinic for an abortion with the domineering and abusive father seems to emphasize that it is not just extremists who abuse their wives and children, but that it can occur in any family.

The strange parallel between Dwayne trying to save his daughter and the demon returning to claim his child is thought provoking and while there is a sense that a distorted form of compassion drives them both the violence and intensity of the tale makes it clear the below the surface of the supposed pro life sentiments are feelings of patriarchy and ownership.

While some have seen the final moment of sadness when the demon regains his child’s body as a reluctance to make a final stand on what is a strong political issue.

However, I think that if you consider the episode as a whole, it is so intense in its portrayal of religious extremists that Carpenter’s



opinions are abundantly clear from early on.

Masters of Horror 2 Season 1 is a superb exploration of “dark cinema”. It crosses genre boundaries and gives us suspense, horror, science fiction, psychological terror and a lot more.

Rather than simply allowing “horror” to exist in a world of fantasy, it explores current issues and social concerns with little concern for political correctness, in many ways it is a series which walks where angels fear to tread!

Masters of Horror 2 Season 1 is graphic and intense and uses special effects to its advantage, sure there is a lot of gore and violence but it is in context and not gratuitous.

Each Masters of Horror 2 Season 1 episode offers intelligent plots, thought provoking ideas and great scares.

Each DVD is also packed with interesting extras to explore.

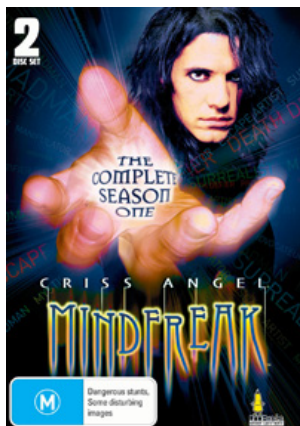
This is a fascinating series exploring horror motifs in a new and innovative way, some more effective than others, but all worth watching.

In Australia Masters of Horror 2 has been released in nice but standard box sets. While in the United States both series have been released in one combined set as an amazing Skull collectable edition .



**Criss Angel:
Mindfreak
Season 1
Umbrella Ent.
R4 DVD**

Criss Angel has been fascinated with magic and performance art since he was very young. Throughout his youth he explored a wide range of art forms, from performance art to stage magic, music to mentalism and mesmerism.



He is considered the most provocative and innovative magicians of today as he combines traditional forms of magic with illusions on a grand scale and presents them in a form that grabs hold of a modern audience. Moreover he regularly eschews the stage and performs in public places and hence his art has an immediacy not found in other more traditional illusionist forms.

He combines his illusions with a gothic presentation and a sense of style which has made him an instant success. Criss has received numerous awards throughout his career.

He was named 2001, 2004, 2005, 2007 and 2008 Magician of the Year, making him the first five-time recipient ever to be awarded these most prestigious accolades.

Criss Angel's Mindfreak is rated the number one television series on A & E and has spawned a wide range of spin off shows, live demonstrations and performances.

The television show ranks number one in countless international markets and the first two season DVDs have consistently been the first and second best selling DVDs in A & E's history.

This two DVD set from Umbrella Entertainment offers the entire first series of the Mindfreak series. It is a fascinating experience which really shows Criss Angel's sense of style as well as his quite astounding magic performances and stunts.

Each episode is around half an hour and includes a range of lesser illusions and a major

performance. These "lesser" illusions are still pretty impressive and range from card tricks through some amazing sleights of hand.

The major feats of magic and illusion are quite startling and range from being burned alive, escaping from a barrel 80 feet above the ground and lying on a bed of nails as a SUV drives over him !

There are some 15 episodes in all, packed with content including lots of street events.

These are especially challenging as clearly the audience is not prepared for what he is about to do and the authenticity of the illusions he presents cannot be faulted.

Included with this series are:

Two commentary tracks by Criss Angel on "Burned Alive" and "Body Suspension" Episodes.

Interactive Illusions Through Your Television Screen

An Inside the Mind of Criss Angel Interview.

**Necronomicon
Brian Yuzna
Christophe Gans
Shusuke Kaneko
R2 Import DVD**



The Necronomicon is set in 1932 where Jeffrey Combs, as a strangle Indiana Jones type version of H.P. Lovecraft is in hot pursuit of the Necronomicon. Visiting a strange Middle Eastern library Lovecraft decides to steal the book and borrowing a key from one of the monks enters a secret chamber. As he reads the forbidden tome it reveals three tales of horror, The Drowned, The Cold, and The Whispers.

The Drowned is about a man who does not want to be found. He is living abroad and has changed his name after the death of his wife.

He receives an inheritance in the form of an old hotel and this opens a strange new world.



Accompanying the inheritance is a letter describing his uncle's experience of the loss of his family, his rejection of God and a strange encounter with a "demon from the depths". He learns that his uncle was able to return his family to life, but at great and terrible cost. Troubled by his own grief he experiences the same fate and ultimately confronts the great god of the depths, Cthulhu.

The Cold, roughly adapted from Lovecraft's Cool Air with added gore for effect, opens with a local reporter investigating a series of bizarre and violent murders. He follows a lead to a local home and under pressure the strange tale of Dr. Madden and his life extending formula is unveiled.

The final tale The Whispers is the most over the top. Extreme gore, violence and some very strange homeless people. It is the most extreme of all the tales and sad to say, the least satisfying. It seems to rely primarily on the shock effect of the gore with little by the way of plot.

The Necronomicon was directed by Brian Yuzna, Christophe Gans, and Shusuke Kaneko and hence the tales are of varying quality. The first two are certainly the most successful and the wrap around story which links them together is fairly weak. As far as short adaptations of H.P Lovecraft tales go, the

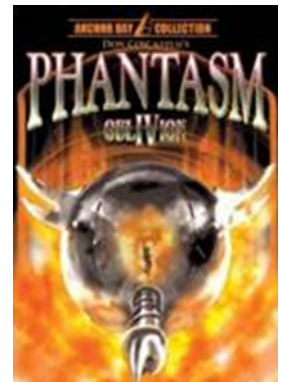
Drowned and the Cold make it worth the effort to get hold of this title.

At present the DVD is not available in Australia, UK or the USA. There is a nice Region 2 edition which seems to be Swiss in origin. It does have an English soundtrack but with subtitles which cannot be removed. They aren't especially intrusive but it is a bit annoying. A French soundtrack is also on the disc. It is a deluxe 2 disc set and includes lots of extras including Audio Commentaries with Christophe Gans and Brian Yuzna (In English), 5 Making of documentaries, trailer, a separate soundtrack menu, picture galleries and storyboards.

It is not easy to find but <http://www.diabolikdvd.com> does have copies in stock and are a reliable source for hard to get import titles.

It also seems it is available from www.amazon.fr (Amazon France—DVD is in English)

Oblivion Phantasm IV Anchor Bay R1 DVD



Phantasm broke new ground in horror; it was an unusual series of films which combined gothic horror, science fiction with cult sensibilities. It also introduced one of the more famous killing tools of the horror genre, the slicing sphere with spikes which drilled into the poor recipients head.

The anti hero of the series was Angus Scrimm – the Tall Man who terrified a generation by turning human corpses into deformed dwarves !

In Phantasm IV: the Oblivion the action continues at a fast pace - the original cast returns as Mike (A. Michael Baldwin), along with Jody (Bill Thornbury) and Reggie (Bannister), undertake a surreal journey through the dimensions of time and space to understand the terrifying birthright of the Tall Man, as well as the origins of the infamous and lethal Sphere!

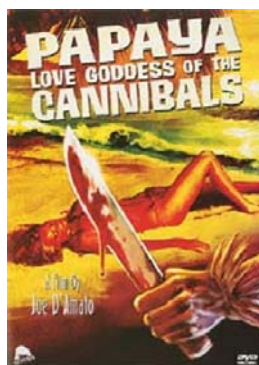
We learn the history of the Tall Man and the dwarves and see the Tall Man's final assault with his dark army with the future of the human race hanging in the balance!

We also learn the terrible truth about the lethal sphere - it seems the dwarfs and the balls are intimately related. The Tall Man compacts the bodies of his victims down to pint size and then takes their brains out and puts them inside the balls !

This is the first US release of the fully uncut version of Phantasm Oblivion, the original release having been cut before North American release. The scenes have not been added as "extras" but edited back into the film giving the viewer the full cinematic experience of this final episode of the Phantasm series.

This edition includes a very smart new anamorphic transfer, a never-before-seen retrospective featurette and a newly recorded commentary by writer/producer/director Don Coscarelli, Reggie "The Ice Cream Man" Bannister and the "Tall Man" himself.

**Papaya:
Love Goddess of the
Cannibals
R1 DVD
Severin Films**



Papaya is an unusual film, directed by Joe D'Amato, best known for his regularly censored classic "Anthropophagus" and his soft porn erotica "Emmanuelle and the White Slave Trade". It stars Sirpa Lane, a Finnish actress and model who starred in such diverse sex classics as La Bete (The Beast) and Roger Vadim's Charlotte. It has a quirky plot which seems to spend a lot of time using every possible situation to offer hot sex scenes set in a tropical landscape to a seventies music beat !

At the same time it attempts to tie in a story about voodoo and an environmental tale of the dangers of nuclear energy !

The film opens with Papaya relaxing semi naked on a beach and meeting what seems to

be her love interest in a bamboo hut, this is followed by a nicely filmed, torrid sex scene which climaxes with Papaya biting off his penis and spitting it out before the hut is set on fire !

Certainly an attention getting opening scene. As the film unfolds we find out that various murders have taken place in the preceding weeks, all of workers on a team building a nuclear reactor, to emphasize the point the charred body of Papaya's ex lover is left in the hut of Vincent, one of the major movers and shakers of the reactor.

As Vincent and Sara begin to investigate what is occurring, they are caught in a web of intrigue created by Papaya. They are invited to a local Fiesta with the hint that they will see the real ceremony, the Rite of the Stone rather than the more tame version presented for tourists and run by the local Catholic Church. As they enter the town the public festival continues in sight, while they are led to a secret location for the original pagan rite. This long censored scene is a beauty ! Combining pig slaughtering, blood drinking, orgiastic sex and human sacrifice, all with a Disco beat - it is a real triumph for D'Amato who seems to want to combine his horror and erotic cinematic pretensions in one film.

The story continues with regular erotic scenes of every possible persuasion combined with environment concerns about nuclear energy and the natives planning a revolt against the reactor and the Westerners building it !

Papaya is a interesting diversion which is hard to pigeon hole, it has elements of horror, loads of sex, an environmental message, strange dialogue obviously dubbed later and a groovy soundtrack.

It is certainly a fun ride and well worth the purchase price.



D'Amato filming is impressive and he certainly knows how to capture the "heat" of a sex scene, Papaya is a great looking film as well as an unusual one.

Severin have done a great job offering the first fully restored uncensored edition of this film ever released.

**Grindhouse Presents
Planet Terror
Robert Rodriguez
Roadshow
2 DVD Extended
Edition**

Planet Terror is one half of the Grindhouse project of Quentin Tarantino. The idea was to pay homage to the Grindhouse experience with two over the top films (Planet Terror and Death Proof) presented in "Grindhouse" format with fake adverts, film breaks etc. In the end these two films have been released individually but still have the Grindhouse presentation and packaging.

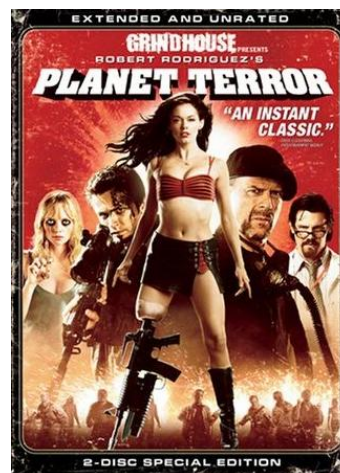
So what is Grindhouse ?

Grindhouses were cinema's who primary film stock were cult and exploitation cinema, usually showing in double bills with advertising in-between. The sort of films that were shown ranged from B grade horror and science fiction through to exploitation, underground and sexploitation, hence the grind in Grindhouse ! In homage to these underground classics Quentin Tarantino directed Death Proof, while Robert Rodriguez directed what is seen by most critics as the better of the two, Planet Terror.

Planet Terror is produced in Grindhouse style, it begins with a fake trailer for Machete. In this very amusing cult trailer, Danny Trejo plays an illegal immigrant hired to assassinate a political leader, but when he is double crossed and shot he demands revenge on those who have done him wrong and a blood thirsty rampage follows quick smart. There is a very funny little scene with Cheech Marin (of Cheech and Chong) playing a gun toting priest who when begged for mercy advises God forgives, but I don't !

The film then begins in earnest, it has all the hallmarks of Seventies cult cinema, the

scratchy film, the breaks in image and the cheesy soundtrack. I must admit that while I appreciate the need for authenticity, the scratches and film stock variations etc are little too gimmicky for my taste.



I did find amusing the "sorry we have lost the reel" sign when the sex scene gets hot and the constant references back to old cult films make the film a fun experience. The music is awfully cool and is so much like a Seventies cult film soundtrack that it is hard to fault.

Indeed, the film itself is so much like an old cult horror classic that at times, except for the incredibly up to date special effects, you might forget yourself and think this is a real Seventies film.

Being a cult film, the storyline is suitably over the top. It is set during one evening and examines a range of characters and their lives as a biological weapon causes a zombie attack to occur and destroy the world around them.

It begins with Cherry, a stripper come stand up comedian who runs into her ex-boyfriend, Wray, at the local BBQ joint, the Bone Shack. At the same time we have the husband and wife team of the Blocks, who are in the midst of a separation except the husband doesn't know it !

It also seems Dakota Block has been having a lesbian affair behind hubbies back and this will certainly come back to haunt her later on ! We also learn about the Sherriff, his deputy and a range of other local characters.

As they go on with their own troubled lives, a group of military officials, led by the rather disturbed Lt. Muldoon (Bruce Willis), are making a business transaction with a scientist named Abby for a supply of a highly toxic biochemical weapon known as DC2 (codename "Project Terror").



Abby is not your average scientist either, he seems to be more concerned with selling to the highest bidder than any scientific endeavors and likes to collect the testicles of people who cross him in any business deal ! He carries them with him to prove the point.

Things, of course, don't go as planned, Muldoon learns Abby has an extra supply and as he attempts to take Abby hostage, Abby releases the gas into the air and things get nasty real quick. The gas has horrific effects changing those it touches into flesh eating, blood drinking zombies covered in pustules and other disgusting deformities.

Even if the gas doesn't get you, any contact with the blood of the infected will. It quickly begins to spread and reaching the township turns its residents into deformed bloodthirsty cannibals.

The film has excellent character development, dialogue and humor, the way in which the surviving characters interact indeed is what makes this such an enjoyable experience. But be warned this is a very violent film; it is packed with all manner of gross scenes, exploding heads, deformed bodies and over the top mayhem, it is perhaps one of the more gore ridden experiences of recent releases, however, the sheer amount of blood and guts give it a certain cartoon characteristic which again reinforces the cult film/B grade horror genre focus.

At the same time it is packed with humour throughout, both in wit and fast moving dialogue to slapstick. Certainly some of the most memorable scenes centre on Candy and her lost leg, these reach crescendo point when she receives a machine gun attachment for her stump from Wray and becomes a groovin' and movin' killing machine!

This will be an instant cult classic and embodies all we have come to love from cult horror.



This is a great double DVD package and includes lots of extras, it is the extended edition of the film.

On the first DVD there is a good commentary by Robert Rodriguez and the second DVD includes:

10 Minute Film School focuses on the special effects and Rodriguez shows how he did some of the major effects for Planet Terror using both live action and other methods.

The Badass Babes of Planet Terror tells of the female casting choices of the film. There are interviews, stories and anecdotes from Robert Rodriguez, Rose McGowan, Marley Shelton, the Crazy Babysitter Twins and Stacy Ferguson.

The Tough Guys of Planet Terror tells of the male casting choice of the film. This has interviews, stories anecdotes with Rodriguez, Tarantino, McGowan, Shelton, Freddy Rodriguez, Josh Brolin, Naveen Andrews, Tom Savini, Michael Biehn and Jeff Fahey.

Casting Rebel is a short bit about the casting of Rodriguez's son Rebel in a main role.

Sickos, Bullets and Explosions. This is an interesting look at the stunts and features interviews with Stunt Supervisor Jeff Dashnaw, with additional comments from Rodriguez, McGowan, Shelton and F. Rodriguez.

The Friend, The Doctor and The Real Estate Agent is a pretty funny piece about the casting of Rodriguez's friend Tommy Nix, his doctor, Dr. Felix Sabates and his realtor, Skip Reissig.

Quest for Fire
Jean-Jacques
Annaud
R4 DVD
Umbrella Entertain-
ment

Quest for Fire was quite an achievement for 1981, it coupled an artistic sentiment with a painstaking devotion to scientific accuracy and helped bring the prehistoric to life in a believable film experience. It avoided the excesses of earlier prehistoric films working for historical accuracy within the framework of a good story. Jean-Jacques Annaud spent long periods in pre-production research bringing in many scientists to advise in the development of the script. Desmond Morris, author of the Naked Ape, developed the unique hand gestures and signs and Anthony Burgess, a highly respected linguist and screenwriter, developed the unique "language" of the film. While today the special effects may have been provided by CGI, they still stand the test of time and the make-up is still very convincing, indeed it received an Academy Award nomination. The film itself won numerous awards including Best Film at the French film awards.

The Ulam tribe live well due to their unique possession of the gift of fire. They guard it jealously as it is a precious substance at the centre of their lives, but they still do not understand how to make it themselves. One day things drastically change when a more primitive tribe attacks and brutally decimates their number, moreover, extinguishing their cherished flame. Lost, injured and wandering in the wilderness, the tribe send three of their number on a quest to find and return with the spark of life which is the centre of their lives.

The journey to find the fire includes all manner of experiences from dangerous animals to cannibals, dealing with each other and other tribes. In the end they must not only gain the spark they seek but uncover the knowledge of how it is made.

This is quite a unique film in that it has no real dialogue and yet with a high quality classical soundtrack matched with superb surround sound creates a powerful experience. The character development and acting is solid (indeed this is the film that gave Ron Perlman



his break) and the depictions of violence, sex and emotion are shown accurately if not somewhat graphically for the time.

The balance of science with filmmaking, unique soundscape and amazing landscapes filmed in Scotland, Kenya and Canada make this a beautiful and impressive film.

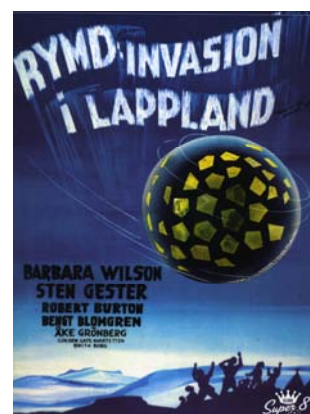
The quality of this DVD release is noteworthy, the DD5.1 surround sound is enveloping and creates a unique sound environment which really enhances the film experience. The picture is clear and without any discernable transfer problems, all in all, it is a superior quality release of a classic film.

The extras include two comprehensive commentary tracks by Director Jean-Jacques Annaud and by Cast Ron Perlman, Rae Dawn Chong and Michael Gruskoff. A Making Of documentary, an interview with director Jean-Jacques Annaud and a series of video galleries.

Rymd:invasion i
Lapland
(Terror in the Mid-
night Sun)
KlubSuper8
Web: [http://](http://klubbsuper8.com/)
klubbsuper8.com/

Rymd:invasion i Lapland was a 1959 Science Fiction made in Sweden. The Swedish version was also known as Space Invasion from Lapland, there was also various US editions with added scenes. It was also known as Terror in the Midnight Sun and Invasion of the Animal People.

The story is very much the quintessential black and white 1950's horror from the skies with weird mutations and monsters. A strange meteor is seen crashing somewhere in Lapland and this is shortly followed by the discovery of herds of reindeer which have been brutally slaughtered. The military call in a special geological team who travel to the remote site to investigate. Along the way one of the team, Erik, strikes up a bit of romance with the niece of the team leader Dr. Vance Wilson and this budding love story between Diane and Erik provides a bit of light relief.





Diane is a suitably annoying character played as a rather undisciplined American who seems to constantly be putting herself at risk !

(I presume this was the Swedish view of Americans in the fifties!)

What they find shocks their world. It is not a meteor at all but an odd spaceship from another world. It seems to have some connection with a huge 20 foot creature which is destroying local villages and killing all those in its way. What it actually wants is never really clear.

It destroys everything it encounters, picking up and crashing buildings and causing avalanches, yet a bit like King Kong takes a liking to Diane and carries her around unharmed. That's until he is cornered by the Laplanders, set alight and falls off the cliff with the alien craft flying back to wherever it came !

This is a truly 1950's sci fi, alien invasion, creature shock classic. It is rare and not often seen so this is a great edition to have.

The picture is as good as one could expect for the age, the sound is fairly clear but with some background noise every so often.

What is especially nice are the extras:

Bertil Jernberg in Lapland: An comprehensive interview about the film.

There is also a gallery, some biographical

data and a couple of extra films.

13 Demon Street: Iskall lidelse The Girl in the Glacier

This is an episode from thriller-TV-series by the team behind the film. Torsten Lilliecrona is an archaeologist who happens not only to find a nude stone age girl in a block of ice hidden deep inside a mine, but falls in love with her at a distance and then goes out of control and murders his colleague to keep her all for himself ! Swedish/US Production 1960

The Lapland Reindeer Ritual

Where young Lapp women practise age old rites.

This is a nice and unusual DVD from KlubSuper8 which is great fun and The Girl in the Glacier is a rather impressive short film too !

The Serpent's Tale (Karanlık Sular) Onar Films Region 0 Pal www.onarfilms.com

"Undoubtedly the most well-made Turkish horror film

**Fear Without
Frontiers (Fab Press)**



Karanlık Sular (The Serpent's Tale) has the reputation of being Turkey's most renowned horror film and it's not hard to see why. This is a visual feast with some amazing imagery, haunting soundtrack and a twisted if not somewhat surreal plot.

The film opens with a spoken introduction giving a warning about the dangers of the contents of this film and the mythology behind it.

We then cut to a group of people in a cinema watching a black and white film which is clearly moving most of them to tears. Two men seem to be noticing each other and watching a middle aged man who becomes intrigued with the behavior of a young girl. He follows her into the foyer. By the time the two men arrive, Hunter (Daniel Chace) and Haldun (Metin Uygun), the man lies dead on the floor from what seems to be a vampire's bite.

It seems Hunter has been following the young girl on behalf of a company he works for, a multinational of which we will hear more later.

Hunter and Haldun go for a stroll into the night and Haldun explains she is an immortal princess and he must seduce Hunter to protect him. Hunter does not seem to appreciate the nature of the situation and Haldun leaves him, giving him a gift and an address where he can be contacted. The film becomes stranger when Hunter goes to Haldun's home and finds he had been dead for some years.

The Serpent's Tale is a film which must be experienced rather than described. While it has many of the motifs we find in traditional horror films such as vampires, secret scrolls, cults and mad prophets, they are intertwined in quite a unique manner. The filming is quite beautiful and evocative and there is a constant sense of dread, even though at times it is hard to appreciate what is exactly happening. While there are various sub-plots and leads which seem to go nowhere, the film itself seems to be effective more on a subliminal level through its use of quite a moving soundtrack and innovative film techniques.

It is all the more impressive in that it comes from a non western mythos and hence being outside the simplistic "good vs evil" storyline of many western horrors offers more scope for exploration and imagination.

The film is presented uncut in its original 1.85: aspect ratio, it is a good print and surprisingly clear. It is occasionally fuzzy, especially in very dark scenes and shows some wear here and there but for the rarity of this film it is a great release.

The soundtrack is in Dolby Digital Stereo and is impressively clearly. Most of the film is in English with the Turkish sections in white subtitles which are in the main easy to read. There are optional Greek subtitles as well. The dialogue is very clear and the music is powerful and evocative, indeed it is quite an imaginative and disturbing soundscape.

There are a great selections of extras including an interview with the director Kutlug Ataman, a photo gallery, biographies, filmographies, press reviews and some great Onar trailers.

This is a very impressive release of a rare

film, it is available in a limited release of 1200 from Onar films and so you better get in quick. Personally I think this is a classic which should be in every horror film buffs collection !!

Shadow Puppets
Michael Winnick
Icon Distribution
R4 DVD



Shadow Puppets is an interesting psychological thriller which borders on genre horror. Eight individuals wake up in an unknown location, they are isolated in rooms which range from padded to a bedroom. At first they are haunted by extreme sounds and a range of strange occurrences such as dimming of the lights and then the doors unlock. They are in some sort of institution or prison, yet without guards.

They are in their underwear and cannot remember their past, indeed even their names cannot be brought to memory. As they explore their "prison" they find hints it is some strange sort of psychiatric institution with other prisoners locked in the basement including the volatile character played by Tony Todd and a Melissa, who is killed at quick speed by a strange adversary - a shadow creature which seems to materialize from the darkness and literally absorb its victims.

As the story unfolds we find the identity of the prisoners and the strange background to this experimental mental institution where memories are "wiped clean". At first it seems such tasks were only undertaken for clinical reasons, but then as the head of the facility comes under pressure he uses the ability to cover his tracks and something (a shadow creature) is let loose. It seems wiping the mind and influencing the balance between the body, mind and spirit is a dangerous pursuit.

This is an interesting film which mixtures psychological thriller with horror, while there is a share of blood and violence, the emphasis is on mood and creating a sense of dread and terror.

The tension is constantly sustained and with the careful use of limited sets and lighting is extremely successful.



The character development is solid and the interplay between the various characters, especially leading to and from the final revelation of which one of them is really the head of the facility faking memory loss, is solid.

Jolene Blalock is a powerful lead mixing vulnerability with strength, fear with a determination to survive, James Marsters play his role well, but I think a few more hints about his identity would have added an extra layer to the plot. Tony Todd as the lumbering criminal is as superb as ever, he is always a consummate performer (who can forget Candyman!) and here is much the same.

For a film made on a limited budget with a minimum of special effects, relying on character development, plot and mood, this is a welcome surprise and worth seeing.

Silent Running **Umbrella Ent** **R4 DVD**

"Silent Running" is set at some future time when Earth can no longer support life and existence on earth only exists within select climate controlled domes. This environment is strictly controlled and everything and everyone is much the same. There is no unemployment or disease, but life has been reduced to a bland and predictable existence. In an attempt to save forests and animals, botanical specimens have been sent into space on various space freighters.

On one of these freighters there is a crew of four men, including botanist Freeman Lowell (Bruce Dern), who tends the plants under huge geodesic domes. Lowell is dedicated to his work, having spent the last three years

fanatically focused on the survival of the forests he tends. He refuses the readymade artificial food offered onboard and only eats what is grown in the forests and views life as it has survived on earth with some disdain.

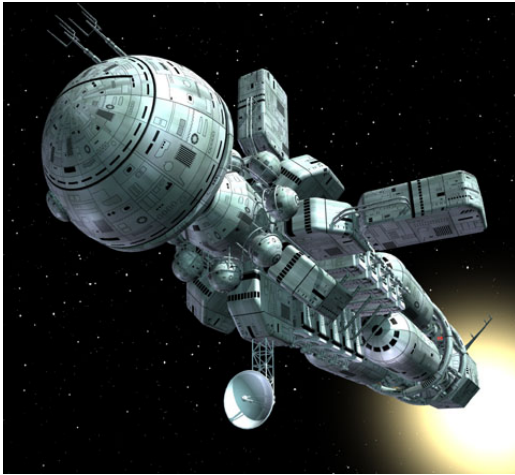
For commercial reasons the crew is ordered to blow up the domes and return the freighter to commercial use. Faced with the possible extinction of the last of earth's natural resources, Lowell does the unthinkable. He fights one of the crew and accidentally kills him. This sets off a chain of events leading to him blowing up the second dome up with the other two remaining crew on board. He fabricates a tale of disaster which he transmits to headquarters and sets out on a lonely journey into space accompanied by three cute little robots named Huey, Dewey, and Louie. As the journey continues and his mental state begins to deteriorate, we experience his isolation and alienation, the remaining robots (one is lost in an accident) become humanized and he struggles to protect the forest. The climax of the story is when, against all odds, he is located by the freight company; he must make the hardest decision of all.

Silent Running was made on a limited budget by legendary filmmaker and visual effects pioneer Douglass Trumbull (2001: A Space Odyssey), who made his directorial debut with this cult sci fi classic. He later went on to create the effects for Blade Runner and Close Encounters of the Third Kind. It is quite astounding to see what Trumbull's was able to do with a small budget, the special effects are very convincing, the acting is superb and the emotional tension created by the film is palpable. For many it is slow film in the sense that it focuses on one man's experience of alienation lost in space, yet it says so much more if you look below the surface. I must admit I would have liked to see what he could have done with a large Hollywood budget.

For me, Silent Running is a fascinating and thought provoking film. Made in 1971 it does show resonances of the Sixties social revolt with some of the music being rather dated and sounding like excerpts from Hair ! At the same time the strong environmental message and the ethical questions it raises have surprising relevance today.

If you were the custodian of the last remnants of earth's natural resources, would you kill to protect them?





In many ways this is a sobering film with a powerful sense of alienation and loneliness. Bruce Dern is impressive as Lowell and we can really empathize with the hard decisions he has to make. Certainly Lowell is portrayed as the “stereotypical” unbalanced environmentalist and vegetarian as one may expect of the time, however, even with this bias, the environmental message is overpowering and startling clear for 1971.

On the whole *Silent Running* has survived the test of time remarkably well, the models still look pretty amazing and it has a visual style which still commands attention.

I found it a very sad film, showing one lone man’s quest to save the last of the earth’s natural resources even though everyone else seems to have forgotten how significant they are. Comparing it to many other sci fi blockbusters of the period I think it is a surprisingly meaningful cinematic experience.

The edition from Umbrella is a good quality transfer with a theatrical trailer.

The Sister of Ursula

Severin Films

R1 DVD

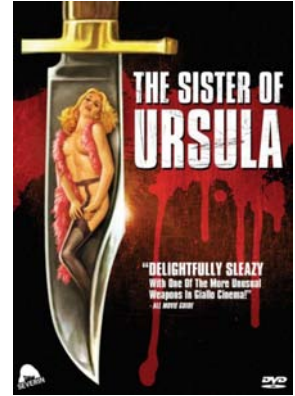
www.severin-films.com

The Sister of Ursula (*La Sorella di Ursula* 1978) is a rare “eurotrash” classic and has not been available outside Europe uncut in any form except illegal, low quality copies.

This is the first official release of a fully uncensored and uncut edition and it is nothing short of superb.

The storyline is suitably extravagant, the Sis-

ter of Ursula tells the tale of two beautiful Austrian sisters – psychic and rather neurotic Ursula Beyne (Barbara Magnolfi of Argento’s *Suspiria*) and promiscuous “can’t keep her clothes on” Dagmar (Stefania D’Amario of Fulci’s *Zombie*). They have a difficult relationship not helped by the fact that their mother ran off leaving them in a boarding house when they were very young and their father committed suicide after a long bout of depression and impotence. They sign in for some rest and relaxation at an idyllic Mediterranean resort but things don’t go as planned. As they begin to relax and experience the ambiance of this beautiful locale Ursula becomes more and more neurotic and difficult.



When Dagmar suggests they go to the bar to see “Stella Shining”, a cabaret singer who sounds more like a strangled cat, Ursula begins to get a strange feeling about some of the people they encounter, especially Filippo and brashly demands they leave.

That night the killings start. These are not your average killings, mind you, it seems our leather clad killer likes to watch couples make love (with us experiencing the pleasure as well vicariously through the screen) and then kill them with what seem to be a extremely large appendage, but is it ?

The way the killer is shown as firstly watching the couple through the eye-holes of a mask and then killing them with only a shadow of a large appendage in sight creates a voyeuristic and edgy feel to each murder.

As the story unfolds we experience a drug investigation sub plot, as much nudity (Dagmar always seems to be taking off her clothes!) and sex (straight and lesbian) that the film can hold, a masturbation scene using a gold chain and, of course, killing via a huge phallus. All this is presented with the background of the beautiful Mediterranean, superbly filmed and filled to the brim with groovy lounge music.

What is amazing here is the mixture of high end photography and explicit sex, Vittorio Bernini’s cinematography is superb, the loca-

-tions are beautiful and the soundtrack seems like that of a trendy travelogue and yet this is mixed with the strangest characters and events imaginable. Indeed, this is what makes this film so successful, the juxtaposition of the idyllic landscape and the sleazy sex, the balance of bouncy, groovy music and a killer eviscerating his victims.

The climax of the film is suitably bizarre with a major drug bust interrupted by the revealing of the killer as Ursula using a large wooden dildo dressed as her father screaming about the evils of sex !

I cannot imagine how Severin found such a high quality print of such an unusual film. The soundtrack is crystal clear, the dialogue is in Italian with removable subtitles and the DVD also includes the Father of Ursula: An interview with director Enzo Milioni and a trailer.

This is a truly perverse and imaginative Giallo thriller with impeccable cinematography, great music and a creative and outrageous plot, I heartily enjoyed this truly sleazy yet stylish eurotrash experience.

Steve Canyon Special Edition DVD

The Milton Caniff Estate

R1 DVD

Web: <http://stevecanyondvd.blogspot.com>

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Steve Canyon originated in a comic strip by Milton Caniff, and the first episodes of the strip date back to 1946. Caniff was a patriotic American and Steve Canyon reflects this. Canyon is a United States Air Force pilot who gets called in for special missions. It is impossible not to compare him with Britain's "Biggles", the flying hero to so many boys up until the 1950s.

Canyon has the same unflappable nature, the same understated patriotism, the same flying ability in whatever aircraft he has at the time.

It was only natural that the comic strip character should translate to a live television series. In 1958-59 thirty four half hour episodes were screened. Caniff's reasonably sensible but action-filled plots have aged well.

The series began with Canyon's adventures in the Korean War, but the bulk of them were



set in the following Cold War days. The patriotism is not overdone, and the quality of the enemy pilots and aircraft is not played down.

The aircraft are often the stars of the show. The series had the cooperation of the United States Air Force (coincidentally it was made a separate service in the same year that the comic series started, and the episodes are dedicated to the men of the USAF) as many of the cockpit shots are inside military aircraft of the time, or show tactics and research and development. The USAF was proud of what it had become, and didn't mind showing off its new aircraft to taxpayers. Canyon seems to have flown everything in the USAF inventory at some time or another, from the old WW2 DC3 through the latest jet fighters like the F102, to the huge B52 bomber.

The old black and white footage has been mostly recovered from the Caniff collection and has been digitally restored and the sound cleaned up. The quality is superb, and really enhances the aircraft shots.

A surprising feature was the commercials that have been left in the shows, mostly for cigarettes and ABC shows that have now passed into history. Although the commercials must have been annoying at the time, now they lend the shows a "period" look that enhances the overall effect.

The series gives a look at the military developments of the time, as well as providing a useful view of early television and a brief history lesson. It could so easily have degenerated into propaganda, but skilful plots and good production make it what it was meant to be – good entertainment starring fast aircraft.

Suspension **Easy Action Films** **R1 DVD**

Suspension is an impressive and haunting cinematic experience. The film opens with a hand-held sequence showing a young family travelling along chattering away with not a worry in the world, suddenly their world changes as another car smashes into their vehicle at an intersection. Daniel Bannet, the driver, loses his wife and son in the accident. However, it is not as straight forward as it seems, as the accident unfolds, Bannet is able to "step out of time" and see the event frozen as though time has stopped. He then awakens disoriented and in extreme pain in a hospital.

As the film progresses we explore Bannet's intense grief caused by the loss of his family, we also see his growing obsession with Sarah Caine, the widow of the man who died in the other car. While playing back a film of the accident his son was taking as the crash occurred Bannet makes a unusual discovery - the camera has gained a frightening ability, it can freeze time. When he presses the pause button the world around him stops—a tossed ball is suspended, people freeze and everything except him is in suspension.

At the same time Sarah is unexpectedly affected by the process, every time he freezes time she experiences a "dislocation" and suffers headaches and dizziness. She can't quite remember what has occurred, but clearly there is a connection between herself and Bannet, one she does not want but cannot escape or explain.

At first he uses the camera to experience the world in a new way, then, slowly his grief moves to obsession, voyeurism and madness as he becomes focused on Sarah and her life.

He begins by watching her and entering her world in "freeze frame" - fixing broken items, leaving gifts, making changes and helping her along her way. This, of course, has dire consequences, as she becomes aware "someone" is changing her life she becomes more and more paranoid and disturbed. She knows she has a stalker but cannot find any evidence of him since every event occurs in "frozen time", she has strange and disturbed flashes of memory but cannot piece them together.



As Bannet's obsession progresses to madness, his changes of her world become more and more blatant, he begins to steal and manipulate the world around him to gain what he needs to feed his obsession and kills Josh, Sarah's potential suitor.

This is a very dark journey; melancholic, grief ridden and filled to the brim with obsession and madness. There is a deeply disturbing voyeuristic quality to the film in which Bannet constantly manipulates and interferes with Sarah's life, it makes the viewer squirm as we watch Sarah's privacy invaded with her seemingly powerless to fight back.

As Bannet becomes more and more out of control, both his life and Sarah's are irrevocably changed, the climax to the film is suitably moving.

This is a superb first feature from directors Ethan Shaftel and Alec Joler and exemplifies the very best in independent film-making. On a limited budget they have created a truly original, riveting and powerful film; it has an intelligent and thought provoking plot and carefully balances a unique visual style with good acting and moving performances, the soundtrack suits the melancholic nature of the film and makes this a truly imaginative viewing experience.

Web: <http://www.neoflix.com/store/EAS50/>

Sweden Heaven and Hell
Luigi Scattini
KlubSuper8
www.klubbsuper8.com



During the 1960's cinema explored many new directions, one of the more unusual was that of the Mondo film.

Mondo films were pseudo documentaries which focused on extreme, unusual and bizarre situations and usually mixed staged scenes with real footage (the word Mondo means world). In many ways these films evolved from the early "health" film genre where scenes of a sexual nature could be shown as they are justified as educational, these early films ranged from Venereal Disease education titles to those on teenage rape, abortion and underage sex and always

attracted a large audience. As “health” films became less successful with the advent of more lax censorship laws during the Sixties, the Mondo documentary was born.

The genre achieved worldwide prominence with the release of the wild Mondo Carne (it’s a dog’s world) and the films that followed it. In a strange way Mondo films were an attempt to deal with the new world that was opening up during the period. As communication became global and immigration increased, customs and lifestyles from other cultures were brought to the attention of the west and the Mondo film explored these, albeit with a condescending tone and a dose of exploitation.

Sweden Heaven and Hell was made at the height of the Mondo fad by Luigi Scattini, it was filmed in Sweden but without permission or appearance releases and was certainly not well received. It is a classic exploitation film but with a tone which is far more critical and condescending than even found in the Mondo Cane series; at times it borders on being anti-Swedish constantly seems to lambast the Swedish for their open approach to sex. It is a strange film in that the commentary is so puritan and narrow that even at the time it would have been somewhat out of step with the trends in cinema, in 2008 the commentary is so politically incorrect it is laughable.

The structure of the film seems to be to cover as much controversial material as possible, sex, sex and more sex, abortion, rape, people dying alone in old age homes, street gangs, drugs etc etc. The scenes discussing rape are outrageously over the top (suggesting rape causes lesbianism) and the scenes in the lesbian bar have an astoundingly homophobic commentary, while of course showing the women kissing each other and in the most titillating poses as possible.

However, these things do not make this a bad film !! Watched today it is a rip roaring politically incorrect comedy.

It is obvious many of the scenes have been faked and the commentary is so offensive, so conservative that it is both infuriating and funny. If you watch this with a broad sense of humour you will marvel at the filmmakers bigotry and laugh at loud at the way in which he chooses the most sexually charged scenes to show and then complains about it !! There is



even an apocalyptic segment discussing Swedish underground shelters and how they want to be some sort of new “adam and eve” after the nuclear winter! A bizarre titbit to notice is that the soundtrack features the song “Mah-na-Mah-na” later to become a hit in The Muppet Show.

This is Mondo cinema at its most outrageous and since it is a very rare film it is great to see it made available. Out of all the Mondo films this is the hardest to find and it is great to see such a high quality release on DVD. Klubsuper 8 have done a superb job, the film is a marvellous print and the sound is as clear as can be.

This is a real winner and worth having in any Cult and Mondo films lovers library.

Tarzan Istanbul'da Onar Films www.onarfilms.com



Tarzan Istanbul'da is certainly one of the most sort after cult films of all times. For years it was believed this obscure classic either did not exist and was simply a collectors urban legend. However, once again Onar Films has made another find in the treasure trove of cult. Produced in 1952 and gathering dust from then onwards, with some remastering and hard work Onar films have made this classic available. This is quite a rare find and is limited to 1200 copies.

This is a fascinating example of early Tarzan cinema, it is clearly an “adaptation” of the Hollywood Tarzan films however is surprisingly well done for the time.

Tarzan is played by Tarzan (played by Tamer Balcı, a Turkish Greek) and the safari includes all characters one finds in western Jungle safari fair but filtered through a Turkish lens. There is Tekin, a hunter and journalist; Netzla, a pilot, her jealous would-be husband Teufik; Aziz, the comic and the unreliable perhaps even dangerous guide Kundo.



The animal footage used is a mixture of stock footage from the original Tarzan and new footage shot in a zoo near Izmir and hence has a surprising realism about it. The story seems to be more oriented towards a jungle adventure than to a traditional Tarzan tale with most of the time taken up with the safari into Tanganyika to find treasure supposedly hidden by Tarzan's parents before they died. However, there are some well-choreographed stunts, animal and chase scenes. For 1952 the animal scenes are certainly more realistic than many others and avoid the use of stuffed animals (as found in Shaw Brothers and Indian films of the same period) and actually use real men and real animals.

Again, Onar has included some nice extras including biographies and filmographies of Kunt Tulgar and Orhan Atadeniz, a solid interview with Kunt Tulgar who played the young Tarzan in the film and a selection of images and posters.

This is a unique cult classic and is well worth the effort to get a copy.

Teenage Hooker became a Killing Machine Third Window Films

Web: <http://www.thirdwindowfilms.com>
R2 DVD

Teenage Hooker became a Killing Machine is a strange, perverse, bizarre yet enthralling experience. It is obviously an underground low budget film produced on digital video, yet overcomes its origins with a superb soundtrack, surreal scenes and an innovative and creative film style.

It begins with some ten minutes of credits which is a bit strange, you would expect these at the end of the film and by the end of them

you are desperately waiting for action and that is what you get. A teenage hooker goes to high school by day and sells herself on the back streets of Seoul by night, her specialty is "voluntary date rape" (no political correctness here !). After one such experience, she is confronted by one of her teachers whose grandmother has been ranting and railing as the hookers sexual trysts have been waking her up at night. He is a sinister man with bad skin, a twisted demonic face and a rather maniacal laugh. He offers to overlook the annoyance of her behaviour so long as he can have a "50 grand special", they then dance in the street and follow each other on bicycles through the park.

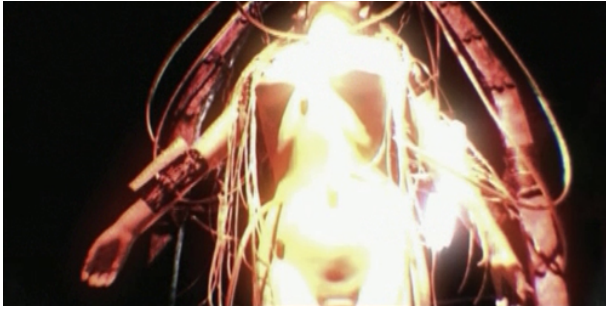


After a hot scene of lovemaking, she declares, in her own way, that she loves him and is pregnant!! She says that while she has been charging her ethics and biology teachers for sex and even her stepdad, she must love him as she has always given him freebies !

However, it seems he has something less than loving in store for her. While she is asleep she dreams she is shot and her baby is blasting out into the air, a gory and bloody nightmare to say the least. When she awakens, there are three strange men with him in the room and together they cut her into pieces. All these scenes are accompanied with superb music, including some quite beautiful operatic tracks, which gives the film a truly surreal feel.

She is then put back together (symbolized by a quirky scene with a strange old lady on a sewing machine) and she becomes a robotic killing machine.





As the gore and bodies mount, the film becomes more and more surreal. The climax is especially amazing, she, in true Frankenstein style, confronts her creator. At first she cannot shoot him as she is “programmed to follow his commands”, but as his wife enters and advises that he has been promoted to principal of the School, she breaks his control. It is said “Hell has no fury like a woman scorned” and she blows his genitals off from a special gun which was created in place of her vagina. In true gender reversal, she then places her genital gun in his mouth and blows his brains out !

This is a truly weird horror experience; it creates a superb mood through creative filming and an unusual soundtrack. The violence and gore are not as extreme as they first seem, it is more that the use of strange angles, editing, music and surreal touches create a textured mood so the imagination can kick in and fill the gaps. It has a dark, vicious and sarcastic sense of humour and at times seems like a mixture of Robocop and I spit on your grave with some comedy to boot !

I greatly enjoyed this strange film and I am sure that many horror buffs looking for something truly unusual will find it a underappreciated piece of South Korean cinema.

Tell me Something
Chang Youn-Hyun
Eastern Eye
R4 DVD

www.madman.com.au

Tell me Something is a moody, grisly and melancholic Korean police thriller. It mixes together a number of different genres to surprising effect; it is a serial killer film, a police drama and a detective tale. It certainly has some blood thirsty moments and some scenes which are gore ridden ranging from dismemberments and a rather graphic impal-



ing to bags of blood and body parts exploding in some very inconvenient locations, but these are not gratuitous and form part of the arc of a complex tale that unfolds over nearly two hours. Indeed I enjoyed the way in which character development was considered as more important than the shocks and gore and that the more violent scenes were part of a well developed and interesting plot.

The film opens with a confronting scene of dismemberment. The victim, who is clearly still alive but has been anesthetized, is being carefully dissected into various parts. The police are discovering various limbs and heads, organs and heads strewn throughout the city, but as they are examined by forensics are found to be mismatched and come from various victims.

At the same time we are introduced to Cho, the detective investigating the case. It seems his mother was ill for a long time and the large bills for her hospital stay were paid for by the very criminal he was supposed to be catching. We see him being interviewed about his possible corruption and not being able to offer any credible defense. Did he accept tainted money or did the unnamed criminal simply pay the bills to compromise his investigation, we never know. This secondary strand of this film is constantly in the background - is Cho reliable or corrupt and can he redeem himself through this investigation.

At first there are few leads, but then one of the victims is identified by dental records and a pattern emerges, they have all dated the same girl, Su Yeon-Chae. When she is interviewed she is cool and aloof and seems unwilling to discuss her life, her lovers or anything to do with her past. The question however is whether she is a victim or perpetrator and this motif continues throughout the film applying to various characters including Cho himself. She does not co-operate with the investigation and only after many killings and much pressure does she reveal her childhood trauma of abuse and incest.

While Cho seems a vulnerable character, there is something detached and cold about the way she describes her previous relationships and her lack of reaction to what are the very brutal killings of her previous lovers. She seems to manipulate her relationship with Cho is this because she is in fear of her life or is it some form of strategy for personal survival.

Throughout the film *Change* explores the dynamics of power and relationships ranging from Cho and other policemen who think he may be corrupt, to Su and her relationship with her past lovers and family and her current friends and acquaintances. We get introduced to a number of particularly intense friends who does not seem to be exactly what they seems, but then none of the characters are what they seem in this film, so which ones are important and which are merely eccentric is the key to his tale.

The filming is impressive and the soundtrack is creative, rather than overusing intense and dark scores as most Western serial killer films tend to do, the soundscape created is sparse, places a strong emphasis on ambient effect and when it does use music (from modern to classical), it does so with great effect. There is an economy in the soundtrack which makes it especially effective, in many cases it deliberately works against what is being shown on scene so you are not sure how to interpret what you are seeing.

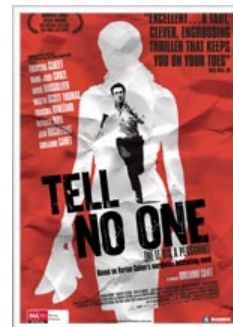
The strange ending of the film is certainly one of the most extreme turnabouts seen in similar films. While there are a number of anticlimatic events during the film where possible killers are found murdered, the ending takes it to a whole new level. This is a somewhat problematic in that all the threads of the tale are not really brought together and too many questions are left unanswered.

Is Su really capable of having manipulated and controlled all the events that have occurred, has she consciously used Cho to cover her tracks or is she so disturbed by her father's abuse that she is pathological. Was she the sole killer or is there something in the story which suggested multiple killers. Even watching the film a number of times leaves unanswered questions The cinematography, score and look of *Tell me Something* cannot be faulted and the acting is solid if not a little patchy in places. On the whole I felt the film lacked emotion and that the ending should have been longer and wrapped up the story better. This is not to say this isn't an interesting and intelligent film, it is more successful than most crime dramas, certainly offers it's shares of shocks and horrors as well as having lots of strange turns, I just thought with such potential Chang Youn-Hyun could have achieved a lot more.

Tell No One **Distributed by Madman** **R4 DVD**

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

French Language with **Subtitles**



Madman used to specialise in Asian films, particularly Manga. Lately they have been bringing in imports from countries such as France. This movie is a murder mystery thriller, and it compares more than favorably to the U.S. equivalent.

Dr Alex Beck (Francoise Canet) was deeply in love with his wife and childhood sweetheart. She was brutally murdered eight years ago, and the murder was blamed on a serial killer who was loose at the time. Now further bodies have been found in the area and the police have reopened the case – this time with Alex Beck as the prime suspect. A mysterious group of killers is planting evidence to convince the police that Alex is responsible for more recent murders. But why are they asking their victims about the whereabouts of Alex's wife?

Alain Attal's direction is superb. He maintains the thread of Alex's love for his dead wife, provides plenty of action as the plot progresses, and builds up believable characters.

One of the best is Bruno, a local criminal who owes Alex a favour and has a sense of honour that compels him to help Alex through one of the nastier moments of the movie. Bruno is a strategic part in the plot but he is not overstated or unnecessarily violent (for a killer). Although the movie has car chases, shootings, and all the violence you could ask for, these do not overpower the story. The whole plot is developed carefully and over the length of the movie, and the final twist is held until the last few minutes.

Although the movie is subtitled, they are in yellow on a black background in a band at the bottom. This makes them easy to read. Subtitles may interfere with the personality development in a film, but they have been skillfully translated to allow Alex's love for his wife to show through. They don't detract from this movie in any way.

I found the sympathetic characters, skilful plot development and steady buildup of the action provided a great contrast to the usual action-heavy American style. If this is what the French movie industry can do, let's hope Madman keeps bringing them in.

**The Bold, the Brave
and the Best
Film Australia
Madman Ent.**
www.madman.com.au

The Bold, the Brave and the Best is a selection of Australian animation covering a wide range of genres and styles.



The series opens with Leisure, a fast paced and satirical look at Leisure and work in Australian by newspaper cartoonist and social critic Bruce Petty. As usual this has a cutting edge and offering a perceptive critique of the Australian way of life. It is nicely done mixing cartoon animation and collage.

This is followed by Crust a strange animation by John Hughes centred around the interactions of two bizarre characters Ropeshair and Evanrude.

Union Street is a superb animation directed by Wendy Chandler with a voiceover by Andrew Denton. It takes the example of a single city street and explores its many worldviews, cultures and ways of life, exploring conflict, crisis and ultimately resolution in acceptance of diversity. Timely and entertaining.

Tiga combines a surreal animation with all sorts of discussions on the Tasmanian Tiger. These range from documentary footage from Hobart in the 1930's, an elderly woman remembering when she saw the last Tiger in a zoo to supposed sightings in the present.

One Man's Instrument is a fun celebration of music and explores how a farmer uses his trumpet to reclaim the world around him from the encroaching of industrialization.

Redback explores how a man with a compulsive cleaning disorder discovers a red-backed spider inside his home, but when it attempts to get rid of it, it fights back.

Cousin is a touching animation of a boys relationship with his cousin who had cerebral palsy.

It is beautifully made and is both an evocation of childhood and a call to compassion.

Love Song is a great fun animation sung by Flacco (Paul Livingstone) it is rude, amusing and outrageous !

Slim Pickings is a superb elastic clay animation. Snork lives on a lonely planet with his friend a little green plant. Snork runs out of food and is starving, to help him his friend, with great effort, produces a single large tomato. Sadly Snork does not see the tomato until too late and eats his friend instead. A story of love and regret !

Ward 13 is a superb horror animation. It is fast paced, filled with blood and gore and superb classic horror film references. The scenes of speeding on a wheelchair through hospital corridors are superbly done and are a stand-out achievement.

Cane Toads is a funny journey into the world as seen through the eyes of Dazza the cane-toad. Dazza is missing his friend Baz and imagines, in graphic detail, what may have happened to him.

Democracy is a short satirical political commentary by Leunig, funny and very sarcastic. Really, truly, your vote does count...

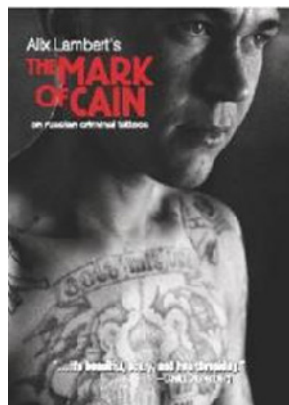
Darra Dogs is a very melancholic animation, which is touching and moving. Dennis Tupicoff tells us of the memories of the dogs of his childhood and how they were used and abused.

Birthday Boy is an award winning animation of Little Manuk. Little Manuk is playing on the streets of his village and dreaming of life at the front where his father is a soldier. He returns home to find a parcel on the doorstep and, thinking it is a birthday present, he opens it. But its contents will change his life.

TISM offers us a fun pop song and ridiculous animation called "Everyone else has had more sex than me"

A great selection of Australian animations offering a wide and diverse range of styles, genres, moods and messages.

**The Mark of Cain
On Russian Prison
Tattoos**
Alix Lambert
Microcinema



The Mark of Cain is a haunting and melancholic journey into the Russian prison system. It uses the significance of the Prison Tattoo to gain entry into the hidden world which makes up the hierarchy of "The Zone".

By asking prisoners to show and explain their tattoos Laverty gains access to the various structures and castes of the Russian prison hierarchy, the conditions under which they suffer and the inherent injustice of the system which not only penalizes them by loss of their freedom, but destroys their health through overcrowding, low quality food and a lack of health care.

We gain insight into the violence and isolation the prisoners suffer including "special treatments" such as the press cells and the White Swan.

The Mark of Cain is superbly filmed with a disquieting soundtrack and careful editing. It basically allows the prisoners to speak for themselves with added interviews with prison authorities, reformers and experts. Through these interviews and a focus on the meaning of the prison Tattoos, Lambert is able to slowly help us gain an understanding of what Russian prison life is like.

The picture we receive is one of individuals who have been so brutalized and dehumanized that it seems unlikely that they could ever readjust to living outside the prison walls. Indeed, as Russia has moved to a more capitalist model, the prisons have become ever more overcrowded with conditions becoming more and more strained. Many prisoners now leave with strains of TB which cannot be treated and hence a short stay can mean a life sentence.

This is a startling documentary with many powerful scenes, it has been carefully presented to avoid sensationalism and allow the prisoners to have their own voice and what

results is a fascinating glimpse into the world of Russian prison tattoos and a powerful critique of the Russian prison system.

The Mark of Cain is in Russian with clear and easy to follow English subtitles.

Web: <http://www.microcinemadvd.com>

**Tintin and I
R4 DVD
Madman
Entertainment**



In 1971, the French-born Numa Sadoul was a young journalist doing a series of interviews with comic-book artists. Travelling to Brussels, the center of cartoon art, Sadoul took a chance and knocked on the door of Georges Remi. Georges Remi, whose nom de plume was Hergé, was the creator of The Adventures of Tintin which had captivated millions of readers, adult and children, for over 40 years. Amazingly, Remi took to the young journalist and gave him some four days of undivided attention, producing an series of brutally honest interviews which gave an unprecedented look at his life, work and the meaning behind the Tintin series.

The interviews, of which 14 hours of original audio material have been preserved, constitute the backbone of this documentary.

Hergé's life was as complex as his art. He was originally a traditionalist Catholic and under the tutelage of Father Wallez developed Tintin as a means to express Christian mortality. Wallez was an extreme conservative and it was in his rightwing newspaper that Tintin came to prominence, indeed for many year Wallez controlled Hergé's life even choosing his wife (Wallez's own secretary).

During the war Hergé worked, albeit with some moral qualms, with the Belgian nazi newspaper and was blacklisted after the war. However, as time progressed and his search for meaning increased, he began to question his upbringing and his search for moral perfection.

He left his wife, began to accept his own humanity (warts and all) and indeed came to embrace modern art, meeting Andy Warhol among others.

This fascinating documentary explores the intersection between Hergé's Tintin and his life experience. It shows the influence of the world around him and how his internal states of mind created the themes of Tintin. It is a superbly made documentary using original taped sequences of the interviews, rare footage, three dimensional recreations of Tintin cartoon sequences and interviews with key scholars as well as with his second wife and other pertinent people.

This is a insightful journey into the world of Tintin and of its author, offering both a reflection on the creative process and an exploration of how the growth of an individual is reflected in his art. Along the way we see the evolution of the modern world through some of its most turbulent periods as reflected in the unique world of Tintin.

This DVD includes some over 100 minutes of extras including:

"I, Tintin" documentary
"The Secret of the Clear Line" short
Interview with Michael Serres
Biography of Hergé
Chronology of the Adventures of Tintin
Diorama of the Characters
Hergé caricatures gallery

Vexille
Madman Entertainment
October 2008 Release
R4 DVD

Vexille is set in 2077, a time when biotechnology has developed to a dangerous new level. Not only can androids be made that are human like in appearance but human and robotic hybrids are now being developed. Moreover, these hybrids are being developed by giant corporations with little to no governmental control.

Citing a variety of concerns, the now greatly expanded and supposedly empowered United Nations has declared all research into human and robot hybrids illegal.

Japan, under strong corporate pressure from



Daiwa Heavy Industries and believing that such research is a great way forward in terms of economic and military strength refuses to implement the UN directive. Moreover, Japan withdraws from international treaties and deploys an electromagnetic shield which locks out all international communication except through official channels. No one goes in or out of Japan except for the shipments of legal robots they supply the world's trade and military.

This new isolationism allows Daiwa to essentially take over the country and implement its own vision of the future. Some ten years after Japan's isolation, more and more evidence is surfacing suggesting that not only has Daiwa continued researching in this field but has perfected a new form of human/machine android.

To verify the true nature of Daiwa's research SWORD, a US special forces team is dispatched. Sadly, their mission goes horribly wrong, leaving team member Vexille alone trying to ascertain what has occurred. Japan has been decimated, the countryside is now a wasteland except for Tokyo and the Daiwa base in the surrounding ocean. It seems that Daiwa used a bio-virus to transform all of Japan's population and slowly they are mutating into machines.

Teaming up with a underground resistance group, Vexille plans to right the wrongs Daiwa has brought the Japanese people.

This is a strange and disturbing film, the visual style is breathtaking. The animation techniques used are the very latest displaying astounding levels of innovation. The motion capture methods used to create the characters is vastly superior to anything seen before.

The whole look of the film is a sort of Manga take on Blade Runner mixed with giant robotic Jags which are like mechanized Sandworms ala a 2008 take on Dune !



At the same time this is not just about looks and appearances. Vexille offers a dark eye on the future, considering the possible future if genetic science and technology decided to work together controlled by multinational corporations.

There are all sorts of interesting ideas here regarding genetic engineering, robots, the resurgence of Japanese nationalism and the powerlessness of the United Nations.

I especially like the key motif that people are slowly becoming more and more robotic until, finally, "their souls blink out" and nothing is left but a machine slave to a giant corporation. Perhaps the biovirus has a certainly allegorical meaning beyond the obvious.

Vexille is a real surprise, packed with interesting ideas, sporting a great plot, superb animation and an awesome soundtrack including hits by Paul Oakenfold and M.I.A.

Wild Card

Third Window Films

Web: <http://www.thirdwindowfilms.com>

Wild Card is an unusual and compelling crime drama which is uniquely Korean and brings together a range of unusual motifs to make a different sort of detective viewing experience.

On one level it is a crime drama, where two detectives Bang Je-su and Oh Yeong-dal are investigating a series of brutal murders.

These seem to have characteristics of both serial killings (i.e. killings via metal ball) and gang related murders. As each crime unfolds, the brutality increases as does the public panic and the pressure on the department.

At the same time we should not think that

Wild Card is just another serial killer/crime story. It is very different from films of similar ilk from the US.

In a US film the emphasis would be on the violence with lots of gun action and underworld drama.



In this film guns are of lesser significance as Korea tends to have a hard line about the use of firearms and the focus is on the interpersonal relationships between the police during the investigation. Indeed a fascinating subplot is examining the negative view of police using firearms in South Korea and the way in which police need to justify any use of firearms regardless of how dire the circumstances.

This does not mean there are not violence scenes, the climax of the film is rather breathtaking and powerful, however, the emphasis is on the texture and mood of the film, the intelligence of the plot and the development of the characters.

This makes Wild Card an "involving" movie experience; you become interested in the lives of the detectives, their fears, loves and hopes. You stumble with them in their mistakes and celebrate their captures.

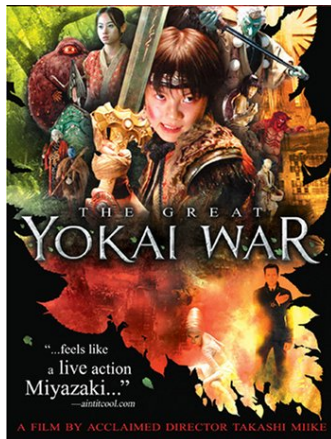
All the characters are well developed, the young thugs have their own repugnant nuances and even the lesser significant underworld characters are well depicted if not slightly stereotypical.

Interestingly, the film does not really include a major "love interest" subplot. While Je-su's attempts a relationship with Chae-young Han, an attractive woman who he meets by checking her ID each night outside her gym and then finalizing realizing she is a forensics officer, it is not really taken anywhere.

This is an above average crime drama which is an interesting and textured look at the South Korean detective experience, by focusing on the personalities and plot, I found this ended up as a superior crime drama which has a lot to offer.

The Great Yokai War
Takashi Miike
Siren Visual
R4 DVD

Takashi Miike is a well known, if not controversial filmmaker, just some of his better known films have been gangster titles, *Ichu the Killer*, *Audition* and *Izo*.



His style is normally marked by ultra violence and transgressive and perverse twists. Even when working on a surrealist film (such as *Gozu*), he packs it with gore, sex and themes which while amusing certainly astound and shock.

He is not the obvious choice for a children's fantasy film director !

In the *Great Yokai war* he has made a very unusual fantasy film. While it is marketed as "family friendly" film, it still scores an M rating in Australia and still has its share of violence and strange and quirky innuendoes and perverse characters.

These are generally subtle, but nevertheless present, it seems that a leopard cannot change its spots and Takashi Miike still makes a family friendly fantasy film a very strange if not adult experience.

In my mind *The Great Yokai War* is a kids film made for adults, while its central character is a child and the story has a certain "coming of



age" resonance, in many ways it plays like a film made from an adults reminiscence of childhood rather than from a child's perspective.

This observation is made more relevant when we consider that the *Yokai* films were very popular during the Sixties and this is a remake of a film with the same name from 1968. It has hence been produced to resonate with baby boomers who were kids during that period and this explains its strange mixture of adult themes in what at first glance is a childhood fantasy film.

There are clearly many adult themes textured into the narrative of the film, ranging from anti war to ecological messages, and certainly a lot of the imagery is not kid friendly.

The strange special effects and violence are certainly tame compared to Miike's other films but still would have most younger kids running from the room screaming.

Sure there are ideas in common with *Dark Crystal*, *Never Ending Story* and *Labyrinth*, but even with some of ideas in these films, none come close to the weirdness in this one. In one scene sure to make the kiddies thrilled, *Sunekosuri* (the fluffy toy interest) is dragged off inside a turned on microwave oven !!!





Tadashi (Ryunosuke Kamiki) is a young Japanese boy who seems lost, his parents are divorced and he lives with his mother and rather senile grandfather- he regularly has hassles with the local kids because he is somewhat different.

During a local festival he finds himself appointed as the Kirin Rider, an honorary title bestowed upon a local citizen to protect the town from the forces of evil. Of course, this only makes things worse; he is now even more a figure of ridicule and bullying, a city kid being named the Kirin Rider seems an affront to the locals and their families.

The local story of the Kirin Rider is based on a legend that on the local mountain there was a battle between the Goblin king and an evil spirit that had laid waste the whole region.

After the battle was won, the Goblin King secreted the sword in a cave in case the evil returned and the sword was needed again to do battle.

When the time is dire and the need has arisen, the sword can be retrieved but it will only be wielded by the Kirin Rider and even then, only after the Rider has proved himself worthy of wielding its power.

When Tadashi travels to the Goblin's cave on the mountain to try to prove to himself he can take the role of the Kirin rider in the upcoming festival and to face his fears. He finds a strange environment filled with unknown horrors as well an injured small strange furry creature named Sunekosuri.

He soon realizes Sunekosuri is a Yokai (hobgoblin or spirit) and that there are good and bad ones and these seem to range from spirits to sprites, dwarves to elves in Western mythology. The term seems to be a generic one used in Japanese myth to cover a wide



range of spirit beings and a wild array of these are depicted throughout the film. Indeed during the battle scene it seems there are literally thousands on thousands of them and this gives The Great Yokai War quite a unique look.

The story then gets interesting with the evil Lord Kato (Etsushi Toyokawa) using the accumulated wrath of the things humanity has thrown away (known as yomotsumono) to convert these spirits into mechanical killing machines. There's an ecological theme if I have ever seen one ! These machines are quite impressive creations, being a mixture of Terminator, cyberpunk and horror motifs.

Everything then goes into overdrive as Lord Kato invades Tokyo and the Yokai's declare war, the battle scenes are totally over the top and it is non-stop action from there on...

In terms of its market, the Great Yokai War was a fairly major film, it had a estimated budget of over \$10 million and was a great success in its projected market. In the West it wasn't as well received as I don't think we really appreciate the unique cultural vision that is behind The Great Yokai War.

It would also be fair to say that due to the relatively limited budget (compared to Hollywood anyway), the amount of animation, CGI etc needed to create so many creatures created a situation where some of them look very B grade indeed. While increased the weirdness, even campiness, of parts of the film it made it difficult to market in the West – is it a kids film, a fantasy or a strange comedy ?

To be honest, I found this film a real romp. It is a wild, silly child's fantasy film made for adults, packed with strange creatures, bizarre themes, lots of action, a quirky sense of humour and an incredibly weird ending which centres around the sacredness of Azuki-beans !

MAGAZINE REVIEWS

Crikey!
Issue 5
Edited by Brian M Clark.
Sequential Media Publications, 2008.
www.crikeyuk.co.uk



Crikey is devoted to the world of British Comics and every issue offers something new and interesting, ranging from feature articles to a rather lively letter section and Crikey Chat always includes interesting discussions on the history of British Comics.

There are lots of interesting articles in this issue including features on the superheroes of the 1950's, Girl titles from the 50 to 70s and a features on the work of Dan Dare and Frank Hampson. There are also great articles on Commando, Oink! and Warrior. All of the articles are extremely well researched and quite substantial. This is a magazine packed with content and illustrated throughout with lots of black and white comics and images.

Crikey is going great guns having read issue 5 and is offering a special subscription deal of six issues for the price of five, great value for an exceptional publication.

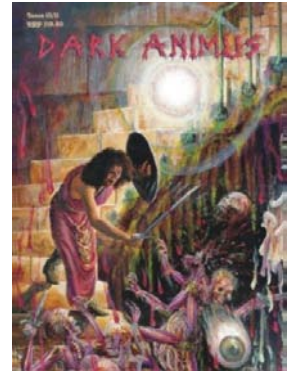
Dark Animus
Editor: James Cain
Web: <http://www.darkanimus.com>

Dark Animus is a high quality magazine produced in paperback format. The current issue is the combined issues 10 and 11 and is over 150 pages, illustrated with a attention grabbing colour cover. Dark Animus offers an anthology of superb horror, science fiction, fantasy and otherwise "strange" fiction coupled with poetry and some great illustrations.

The editor of Dark Animus certainly knows how to choose the best tales to include; many stories from earlier issues have either won Science Fiction and horror literary awards or become finalists.

Dark Animus takes me back to my childhood

when pulp anthologies of horror and science fiction (as well as strange/weird tales) were common and I saved every penny to get the next issue. Dark Animus follows in this tradition, packed with content, with little advertising and "padding" it is exceptional value for money. It offers all sorts of intelligent and challenging fiction aimed at the mature fiction reader coupled with some great art as well.



Many of the stories are from well established authors and it is nice to be able to "sample" a wide range of writing styles and genres in a single publication. I think the novellas offered are just the right size; they have enough length to both develop a good plot and solid characters without becoming full sized novels in their right.

Rather than go through story by story, I will just discuss a few that especially took my fancy. "Just a game" is an especially apt tale exploring the world of the internet and total immersion computer games. Will such an environment make our world safer or will the violence and aggression of this virtual domain spill over into our world and, if it does, what has to be done to stop it. "Cold Desires" is a frighteningly powerful tale which slowly reels in the reader and carries him or her to the final climax which is confronting and twisted. It is a superbly transgressive experience. I am always a sucker for a zombie story and "Dig This" places the zombie tale in a new and intelligent context where nothing is at it seems, while "The Shape" concludes the volume with an impressive post apocalyptic story.

There are twelve solid stories in this anthology, all of which are of the highest quality, while I have chosen a few to mention, all are of superior quality and I cannot think of one that fails to hit its mark.

Dark Animus has an "edge", the stories included are always original, dark and gritty, they range in genres but the emphasis seems to be on tales which hold the attention and stimulate the mind.

While certainly some include a level of violence and "mature content", it is never gratuitous or unnecessary, I really appreciate the editorial style of Dark Animus, it is clear that James Cain knows what he wants to read and what genre readers want to read and does not diverge from this standard one iota.

At the same time this is why Dark Animus is not for profit with all monies channeled back into the publication – it is difficult these days to produce a publication with such an "authentic" vision and make money.

I would encourage anyone with an interest in edgy, intelligent and challenging fiction to read Dark Animus. It is a very rich smorgasbord and satisfying on so many levels. It is a publication which will not "date" and you will return to it again and again.

Ditkomania
Quarterly Zine
Email: robimes@yahoo.com

Steve Ditko is an enigmatic comic artist who was the original co-creator of Spiderman. His is a very private man who is dedicated to his art and his unique vision of the world, informed by the Objectivism of Ayn Rand. In recent times there has been a renaissance of interest in his work and a realization of just how significant his art was in the context of the development of modern comics.

Recently, a comprehensive biography was published by Fantagraphics -Strange & Stranger: The World of Steve Ditko written by Blake Bell, a Ditko scholar. Ditkomania was one of the premier small press zines dedicated to the work of Steve Ditko and after "being away" for some years has recently reappeared on the scene. It is a great publication with rare artwork, thoughtful articles and lots of content not found elsewhere. All the articles are comprehensive and well researched, giving coverage to the many superheroes and characters developed by Ditko as well as to major themes within his work. The authors are obviously dedicated fans and collectors with lots of knowledge that can only come from years of interest.

Issue #67 is planned for August and #68 in Mid September. It is very reasonably priced. Outside the US the subscription is \$13.60 (US) for four issues and a sample for \$3.40.

To be honest I think this is a bargain for such an informative publication. Payment should be sent with international money orders.

For anyone with an interest in the work of Steve Ditko, or indeed, with an interest in the development of modern comics, this is a publication that is worth having. Rob Imes is putting a lot of work into every issue and Ditkomania deserves our support.

Web: <http://www.ditko-fever.com/dmreturns.html>



Electric Sheep
Summer 08 Issue
Distributed:
Wallflower Press
www.wallflowerpress.co.uk



A deviant view of Cinema

Electric sheep is a thoughtful and intelligent magazine of alternative cinema. It features well researched articles on major genres, significant filmmakers and trends within cinema.

It also offers extensive coverage of film festivals and a selection of DVD/Cinema reviews of significant alternative cinema. It also includes various interviews and general news.

It is great to see a magazine focused on non mainstream cinema with intelligent and insightful reviews, issue Summer 08 has a solid cinema and jazz focus to coincide with the re-release of Charles Burnett's Killer of Sheep.

Electric Sheep is beautifully presented, nicely illustrated and offers high quality content matched with solid articles. This is a solid magazine; it has a small amount of advertising with the vast majority of its space packed with content.

It is certainly more than well worth its asking price. Electric Sheep is a quarterly magazine and having reached Issue 17 is now published by Wallflower Press.

Web: <http://www.electricsheepmagazine.com>

Girls and Corpses Magazine

Web: <http://www.girlsandcorpses.com/>

Girls and Corpses is one of those magazines you just have to see to believe, it takes the maxim that more is better and pushes it absolutely to the limit. More babes, more humour, more horror, more comics and of course, more corpses. The corpse centrefolds are stunners and the photography is to die for !

The first thing you notice about Girls and Corpses is its perversely high production values; this is a full colour magazine, packed with woman in all manner of demeanour appearing with corpses in every stage of decay. There is a superbly depraved humour about it all which makes every issue an utter blast.

There are also a wide range of satirical adverts offering everything from Herbadeath diet powder to the superbly disgusting Skid Mark Eraser. Be ready for lots of bad taste humour, offensive jokes and politically incorrect comments, it's part of the territory and what gives this mag it's charm ! There are also some great full page send ups including Martha Stewart Death and Corpsy the love doll to Barely Dead which advertises such wonders as Muff Pie for the Dead Buy and Spank my Cold Booty !

Amazingly, it is not all humour; there are some great articles ranging from erotica (such as an interview with the insatiable Marilyn Chambers) to sideshows (a great piece on Johnny Eck including sections of his notebook).

However, of course, with the title corpse in the title, the focus is on horror and generally on the "necro" side of the equation, these include articles on the Tantric Indian sect of the Aghori (who are rumoured to be cannibals as well as Left Hand Path sorcerers), Merchant of Death on Victorian death ephemera, My Life as a Mortician, a study of torture instruments and the Day of the Dead in Mexico. These are well researched and surprisingly informative, always well illustrated and entertaining as well.

And this is not forgetting the loads of comics, cartoons, artwork, interviews with music bands, and more and more. There are always a great range of interviews including filmmakers, bands and artists. Erotica, horror, death, humour, babes and everything you



would not expect to find presented in one outrageous magazine. In Volume 1 Winter there was even a special Scat in the Hat feature offering 3D photography of babes and corpses and yes, they really jumped right off the page.

This has got to be one of the most bizarre horror magazines on the market but it has so much going for it. It mixes together so many things that the horror buff enjoys from films and music, death to sex, humour to plain cynicism.

For a magazine filled with corpses, I wish it a very long life !

It is on the shelves in newsagents in the US and Canada, Aussies and other should go to the website and get copies of this joyful celebration of gore and girls, sex and death !

What's there not to like !



Inside Artzine

Web:

<http://www.inside-artzine.de>

Underground Art Zine

Inside Artzine is produced INSIDE by a collective of underground artists and other related "outsiders". It is quite a stunning publication, both in content and quality of reproduction. It literally explodes with controversial and confronting content and will stimulate lots of debate and comment. The various forms of art - paintings, drawings, digital collages and sculptures are reproduced in superior quality and jump right off the page.

These amazing images are supplemented with short stories, poetry, interviews and a great reviews and links section. If you want to know what is happening in the underground Art Scene, this is the publication to get hold of.

Issue 12 has some especially fascinating content including an interview with the designer of Autopsy Babies, which have caused such controversy on the web and a piece on the censorship of the work of Michael Dickinson.

There are also some superb larger size images, a couple which really grabbed my attention were the intricate sculpture Lust and Self Abuse and the double page image Religion, the photo image of a Church on a tank on page 32 is also rather nice and has a important message to communicate in these mad days of politics, fundamentalism and war.



Lust and Self Abuse Kris Kuksi



While it may be published in Germany, **Polyester Books** (Australia) always has copies in stock so don't make excuses and get yourself a copy.

Web: <http://www.polyester.com.au>

Mansplat

www.mansplat.com

What is Mansplat ?

Well it is described as bathroom litter-ature for men but chicks can read it too ! and it certainly lives up to its by-line.



Lots of outrageous humour, offensive articles, wild reviews and toilet humour. It is presented like one of those old underground newspapers with strange headings, fake humorous adverts and a few cover girls !

Articles range from the semi serious to the insane, everything from guides to drinking when driving, to a guide to Vikings.

Issue 42 for example includes a feature on "A Little Off The Bottom: ManSplat's Handy Guide to Shaving Your Crotch", The First 5 Things To Do When You Get To Heaven, Urine A Lot Of Trouble: ManSplat's Handy Guide To Piss Poor Health, Hang 'Em Higher: Country Music Legends Vs. Country Music Dillholes and lots more...

The articles are well researched, humorous and entertaining; filled with irrelevance, off the wall humour and yet offering good reviews of all sorts of films, books and products. It also has solid music coverage with a focus on hardrock and metal.

They also produce Drink 'in and Driv' in Review Guides to horror, cult and everything else in the world of cinema and beyond. They are up to Volume 3.

Volume 2 reviewed classic horror and sci-fi, with hundreds of takes on films from the '40s, '50s, some '60s, a lot of '70s and a plethora of '80s. You can also visit their blog at:

Blog: <http://mansplat.wordpress.com/>

Mineshaft Magazine

Web: <http://www.mineshaftmagazine.com>

What is Mineshaft ?

Exactly how to describe this little gem of a publication is difficult. It is beautifully made, even looks handmade at times and brims with underground comics, strange poetry, rants and articles which actually make the reader think rather than shoveling them another mouthful of mass market consumables. It is typeset in an eccentric manner with occasional handwritten flourishes, comics, art and photos, perfectly professional yet fiercely independent. Awesome !

Issue 20 opens with a great comic called Faith based Terrorism and the title says it all – insightful and entertaining.

There are all sorts of interesting letters, poems and articles, including Jay Kinney's reflections on visiting Turkey. There are also some great comics, as one would expect, such as Dirty Diana and Port Authority.

In Issue 21 There are some great Zippy comics, sketches by Crumb, a melancholic article on decay in a small Midwestern city and a very cool conversation between Christoph Mueller and Joe Coleman coupled with the sort of strange illustrations one would expect from such a coupling.

Mineshaft seems to embody the truly independent and individualistic ethic so missing from mainstream publishing, it is challenging, intelligent, superbly presented and above all, impossible to label or pigeon hole.



Issue 22 for example, includes a fascinating feature on Women daredevils of Muscle Beach, a double page spread of the "other women in comics", a fascinating dialogue by Jay Lynch and Kim Deitch both offering poems and unusual reflections and more.



Each issue seems to offer a motley mixture of hard to conceptualize content, all of which grabs and keeps your attention for long after you read it !

Each issue seems to offer a motley mixture of hard to conceptualize content, all of which grabs and keeps your attention for long after you read it !

Having read three issues so far, I can't wait to see what they offer next !

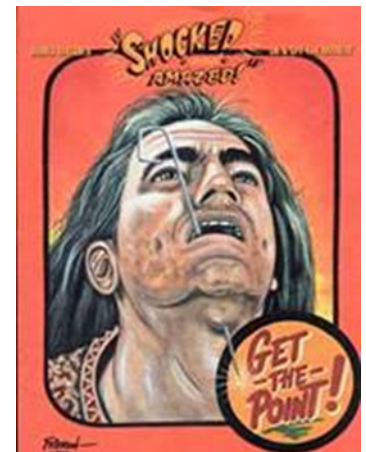
They also have some great postcards too, check out the website - <http://www.mineshaftmagazine.com>



Web: <http://www.shockedandamazed.com/>

Shocked and Amazed: On and Off the Midway is the only periodical dedicated to Sideshow and Variety entertainment!

It is a quality publication with a colour covers lots of rare photos and only a few pages of advertising. The typesetting and presentation is that fitting a sideshow magazine with related fonts and "look". The rare photos are really stunning, reproduced very clearly; a lot of these photos will not have ever been seen anywhere else.





James Taylor—Editor of Shocked & Amazed

It is a larger size periodical, Issue 9 is over 125 pages and includes a good mix of regular items, ongoing series and one off features. For example, issue 9 has a major feature in the form of an interview with Tim "Zamora the Torture King" and what a very comprehensive interviews this ! It cover 18 pages (including photographs). There is also a interview with the Lion King who started working with wild animals when he was ten years old !

Other features include one on Medicine Shows and cures and Le Petomane, the French sideshow artist who blew air out of his anus to music. There is also a great photo essay – the history of Ken Harck's Bros. Grim Sideshow.

In addition, there are continuing series such as the next installment of "The Strand," on variety entertainment at the turn of the century and the next installment of Walt Hudson's "Coney Island Baby".

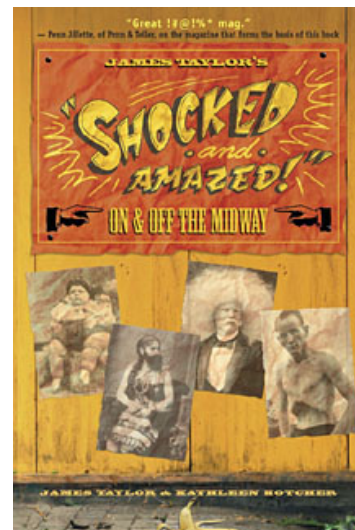
There are also some great articles which are excerpts from unusual works, such as a sizeable excerpt from Rattling Yours – The Story of the Snake King. This is a prize piece about a man who supplied exotic animals to carnivals throughout the first half of the 20th century.

There is also an excerpt from Black like You by John Strausbaugh, a fascinating examination of the origins of minstrelsy.

And there is still more ! This is a utterly original publication that keeps your attention from beginning to send. It is filled to the brim with strangeness and weirdness and everything

you would expect to find in a carnival and sideshow; you will truly be shocked and amazed by both the superbly researched articles, great interviews and stunning photography.

**Also Available:
The Best of
Shocked and
Amazed.**



This best of book includes a wide selection of articles from the issues thus far. Issue 1-3 are especially hard to find these days since they were print in very limited print runs, so it is great to have a good selection of articles, interviews and photos from this rare issues back in print in a lovely book format. It is 240 pages long and covers the best of volumes one to Shocked and Amazed Volumes One to Six.

Torpedo Magazine
Quarterly Fiction Magazine
Web: <http://www.falconvsmonkey.com>

Torpedo is a very high quality magazine focused on providing a medium for fiction writers to reach a wide audience. Each issue is lovingly produced with high quality content including stories, artwork and comics.

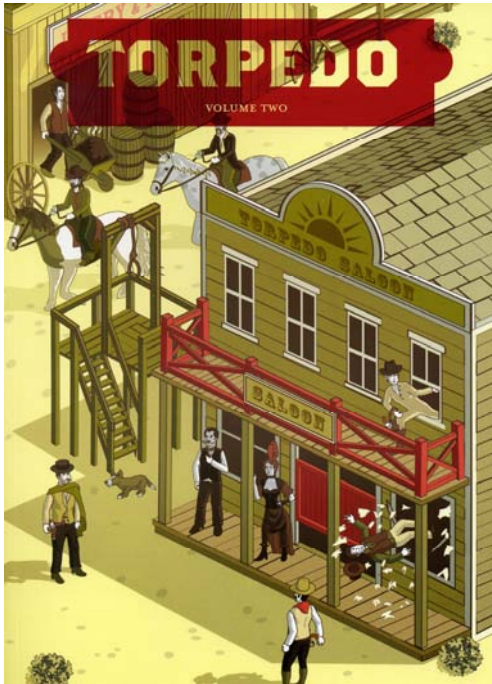
The first issue was around 150 pages, the second has reached 160.

They have not scrimped on either the production values nor the printing, these are superior paperbacks with super colour covers and great art throughout.

The content is, well, nothing short of amazing.

Each story is impressive, and clearly has been chosen for its quality.





There is a wide range of genres and the artwork and graphic tales are just as riveting. Torpedo has a great sense of humour and while focused on the significance of fiction writing, doesn't take itself too seriously, so there is a lot to laugh at as well as to ponder.

I am especially taken by the ethic of the publishers of Torpedo, Falcon vs. Monkey. In these days of mass market cinema and literature, it is nice to find a publication with a strong commitment to its authors. For Falcon vs. Monkey its authors are its lifeblood, not commodities just to make a buck off. For every copy sold via their website and they sell exclusively through their website to maximize the commissions they can pay, they give 50% of the cover price in royalties divided up among the contributors. So, for example, volume one contained the work of twelve writers and four illustrators, so for each copy sold they receive one sixteenth.

This is an exemplary model, rather than just giving their authors a flat fee and pocketing the rest, they work to support those who support them. Not only that, the editor's royalties will be put aside to create a Falcon vs. Monkey literary prize for the support of a young artist. While, the remaining 50% of the cover price will be spent on printing, advertising and, in the world of the editor, perhaps some delicious mulled wine!

Having spent the last few cold nights rolled up beside a fire reading Torpedo I can tell you each issue is packed with some real gems

and well worth the cover price, I was absorbed into every tale and found hours drifting by in literary bliss !

\$80.00 for four issues is nothing compared to the price of novels these days and they will be something you will enjoy for many years to come. I think it is very important these days when small press and magazines are having it tough to find such treasures as Torpedo and support them !

I suggest you visit their site forthwith and subscribe, you will be very pleased you did.

Wholpin Magazine

Web: <http://www.wholphindvd.com>

Quarterly Magazine of Film Shorts on DVD

What is Wholpin ?

It is a fantasy hybrid of a Dolphin and a Whale, a bit like Wholpin magazine which is a hybrid between a DVD and a magazine and that what makes it so unusual.

Wholpin makes available rare and unusual short films, documentaries and other visual titles which are hard to put in a category. While the internet can be a fun place for short films, still is still an issue, and hence the quality is usually rather limited.

At the same time short films are usually difficult to market as standalone products. Wholpin solves this by offering a unique quarterly magazine packed with all sorts of gems.

It is hard to label Wholpin, the content varies film to film, but it is always interesting, challenging and entertaining.

Sometimes the shorts are whimsical and funny, often times powerful yet rarely seen documentaries, there is always a balance in content so each issue offers "something for everyone".

Wholpin is beautifully presented in a "book like" case which has the DVD in the front and a detailed colour booklet describing the content.

Issue One, Wholpin's premier issue showed they were off to a great start. It offered the rare and unseen doco on Al Gore by Spike Jonze, a strange Dutch artist singing backwards (including a weird version of Stairway to

Heaven), the Great Empty which is really an “art” short which examines the experience of emptiness and cultural isolation under the guise of Selma Blair finding she has a real gynaecological problem, a great empty literally inside of her !

While this short seems like absurdist humour, it has a poetic and allegorical message. There is more including an amusing re-subtitled Turkish Sitcom, an Iranian animation and a film on U.S. soldiers in Iraq. What a damn good start for a magazine!!

Issue two includes some amazing short films. The Mysterious Geographic Explorations of Jasper Morrello is an astounding experience which is superbly rendered and animated. There is Steven Soderbergh’s intense sci-fi homage to Godard, a rather weird how to film on “Poke Poling a Monkey-Faced Eel” and a rescripted Japanese sitcom which has to be seen to be believed and that’s just the start. Issue Two includes a Bonus DVD which is Part One of Adam Curtis’s highly acclaimed documentary, The Power of Nightmares, which follows the simultaneous rise of Islamic fundamentalism and American neoconservative thought.

Issue three includes a very rare performance art piece by Dennis Hopper called the Russian Death Chair, a documentary about a thirteen-year-old Yemeni girl who refuses to wear her veil, a nice short about playing with a ball over razor wire and another strange nature doco, this time on the “The Popcorn Effect” of trap-jaw ants.

There is again lots more, including some



great animated films and a bonus DVD featuring Part Two: “The Phantom Victory” of Adam Curtis’s powerful documentary, The Power of Nightmares.

Issue four includes a solid excerpt from Strange Culture which examines the paranoid mindset in the US after 9/11 and how this led to the mistreatment of the artist Steve Kurtz. Heavy Metal Jnr is a doco about a young, very young, Scottish heavy metal band, while Heavy Metal Drummer explores a drummer in Casablanca where such music can lead to a morals charge !

Of course there is a lot more and another bonus disc featuring the final instalment of Adam Curtis’s The Power of Nightmares. Part Three: “The Shadows in the Cave.”

Wholpin five includes some truly mind shattering shorts including one on the world champion, one-handed, blind-folded Rubik’s Cube master and one on Carrie and Mary Dann who are feisty yet rather elderly Western Shoshone sisters who live and ranch in beautiful but barren north central Nevada. Like most Western ranchers, they graze their livestock on the open range outside their ranch and this has led to a legal battle which went to court, the Supreme Court and then to the UN !

There, of course, is much more, even a film on the Darfur rebels literally smuggled out of Sudan in the back of a horse cart.

Wholpin is one of most entertaining and erudite of publications, mixing together documentaries, art films, humour, comedy with animations and world cinema.

It offers such a diverse mix of fascinating content that it impossible not be to be drawn into each issue spending time exploring the different viewpoints and experiences offered.



Wormwood is a regular paperback journal devoted to discussion of authors, books and themes in the fields of the fantastic, supernatural and decadent in literature. It contains essays, articles, short appreciations, new research and perspectives from new and established writers about acknowledged major authors, lesser-studied writers, and those who are unjustly neglected.

The essays usually include a nice image of the person or book being discussed and other rare black and white images are included. The paper chosen and print used is easy on the eye. This is not a throw away magazine, but a journal to keep and cherish.

The essays are intelligent and insightful but avoid undue academic jargon. So often when we are looking for books to read we look to what is on the market or what is happening next, as a culture we are obsessed with the new, the latest fad, the “in” author.

Wormwood
A HISTORY OF THE FANTASY, AND FANTASY AND ALLY
Edited by Mark Valentine

The Tenthredine is the Oakleaf: The Duck Women of Wendell Marjorie by Joel Katz

Continuum: Cane of Dandelion, Mound of Mistletoe, Haze of Sorceries by Aidan Dals

The Glass Unicorn: Two Faces 1940 by Herbert Rittz by Paul Newman

Shadows Arise! The Last Light of a Century: From the Book by Graham S. Grier

Close Encounters with Don Ciccio

C.L. Moore by E.J. Smith

David Brin: An Update by Terry Shaw

The Hazyon World: A Book for Brian Hubbard

Love Beyond by George A. Anderson

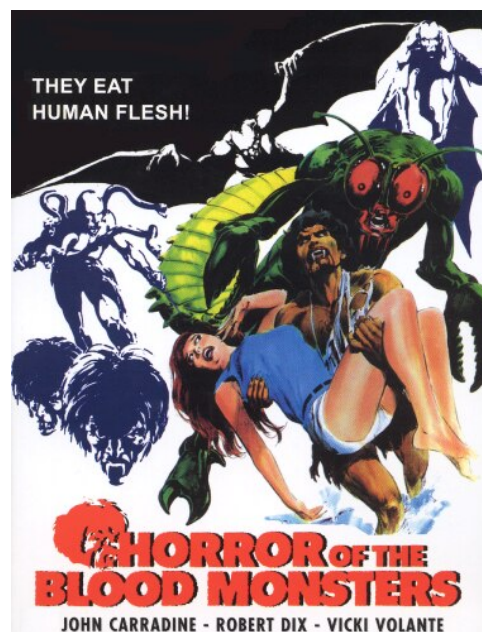
Wormwood, Spring 2007 *Terrace Press*

Looking over the four issues I have in front of me, we have fascinating introductions to Josef Simanek, a Czech Pagan Fantastist, the Lost Genius of Lionel Britton, the Dark fiction of Theodore Sturgeon and an overview of the work of Higushi Ichiyo among others.

There are also late reviews and Camera Obscura which considers books we have may overlooked.

Web: <http://homepages.pavilion.co.uk/users/tartarus/wormwood.htm>

Web: <http://homepages.pavilion.co.uk/users/tartarus/ip.htm>



MUSIC REVIEWS

Brute Force
Griever
Industrial.org
www.industrial.org



Industrial, noise and related electronica has in my experience been primarily connected to the darker side of imagery ranging from misanthropy to serial killers, this is an interesting departure in that it focuses on issues such as the internet, freedom, social manipulation and government control. It is a work based strongly around a theme and the very nice presentation of the CD packaging emphasizes the content, it is a three section digipack with interesting quotes, images and photos.

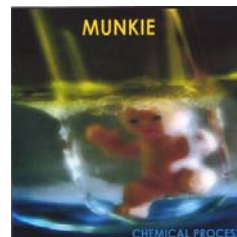
The music is industrial power electronica, each piece is carefully structured and ranges from atmospheric industrial right through to strong wild pieces such as Mpack vs. Storm where the full force of industrial music is mustered with wild percussion, strong and loud voices even shrieks and related madness. Each track offers something unique and different and this thematic approach is interesting, this is not an undetermined spontaneous work, it is meticulously planned and executed. Griever are innovative music makers and use modern sounds, cracks, grinds, bleeps, clangs, thuds and all manner of unusual sounds mixed with electronic to create a three dimensional textured sound which is evocative and powerful.

Brute force is an angry work; the music seethes with fury and disgust, most aimed at government controls and manipulation. Brute Force' is a superb example of extreme power electronics/ death industrial, exploring subject matter that very few have so far explored and it does so with gusto and style, get ready for an unusual and confronting experience.

Chemical Process
Munkie
Sunshine Music
Indie CDs (Australia)
www.indie-cds.com

Munkie is the alter-ego of Jason Clark, Producer, Composer, Musician and Remixer. The

music he creates is an electro art-form containing elements of many divergent genres, it stirs the emotions and takes the listener on a rollercoaster ride from the dark and foreboding to the refreshingly cheerful and even inspirational.



He seems to be the master of moving between soundscapes and this album moves effortlessly through a myriad of forms.

I really enjoy the mixture of genres, a lot of the album is fairly down tempo electronica through with various expressions, Think Skin is certainly is more drum and bass and is the most melancholic piece.

The album begins with Antidote to Strychnine, which has a very cool, downbeat sound and some great vocals, it suddenly then changes with 'More Precious Than Gold' which is far more upbeat, cheerful and includes some a cool modified voice. The upbeat sound is continued with 'Fire In My Heart' , which has a great bass line, some superb beats and a great seductive voice track.

'(We Are) Automated' is a change of pace, it is an unusual track and starts to move the album into darker territory, this is continued with the edgy Shatter The Circles, which has resonances with the 80's robotic sound of Gary Numan and climaxes in the drum and bass number Think Skin, which is soft, beautiful and rhythmically overpowering.

The last three tracks move the album back into same explorations as the first tracks and bring the album full circle.

This is a very accomplished album. The textured sounds, the varying soundscapes, the layered synths and processed beats offer a truly atmospheric electronica experience, lyrics, voices and forms are mixed together to create a very lush experience.

The fact that Munkie is able to navigate through so many genres and forms and move effortlessly through a landscape of sound from light to dark and back again makes Chemical Process an extremely consummate album.

**Delirium Tremens:
The Best of
Chthonic Force
Chthonic Force
Discriminate Audio**



Delirium Tremens: The Best of Chthonic Force is a very unusual musical experience. It is the joint project of Vadge Moore (ex-Dwarves / Phoenix Thunderstone) and Wendy Van Dusen (Neither/Neither World). Since the band's inception in 1999, Chthonic Force has released two full-length albums (1999's Chthonic Force and 2003's Agathodaemon), a split single (Mouth Pigs), and appeared on several compilations. This is a superb introduction to their unique sound and presentation.

Musically it is an adventurous production transcending a range of traditional genres and mixing ambient, metal, electronic, and industrial as well as what could be interpreted as noise and textured sound effects.

In regards to content it really pushes the boundaries, this is a collection of tracks which have been carefully and deliberately compiled to go beyond the confines of bourgeois morality and examine thoughts which would normally be considered contraband. Satanism, amorality, sadism, mass murder, might is right and misanthropy are all part of the package.

This is not petty diabolism or simple rebellion, these are well considered contraventions of traditional values and will force any listener to consider the hypocrisy of modern standards of behaviour and so called ethics.

There are also some amazing voice dialogue tracks by such dark luminaries as Peter Sotos and Boyd Rice.

This is a dark and confronting album with both a superbly edgy musical style and content which makes it stand out from the crowd.

It is only available in limited release from Discriminate Audio so make sure you get a copy quick. You will be glad you did.

Web: <http://www.discriminateaudio.com/>

**Little Evil Things
Frank Macchia & Tracy London
5 CDs
Web:** <http://www.littleevilthings.com>

Bite sized Tales of terror to Chill your Bones !

I love horror ! Supernatural tales, werewolves, monsters, strange plot twists and characters you can't trust. While I adore a great horror film, there is something to be said for mediums which let your own imagination do the work. The horror novel is always good for a rainy night but in today's hectic world when reading seems to be too time consuming and multimedia is the way to go, the audio book is always a good option. However audio books are only as good as the production, simply reading a book onto a CD is not enough these days.

Little Evil Things takes the audio book to the next level, they are not just audio books, but tales which have been enlivened with music, special effects, background sounds and a great presentation. They combine the very best sound technology can offer combined with impressive tales which revive the classic elements of horror storytelling and present it in a modern medium.

There are now five CD's available in the Little Evil Things series and hence there is more than enough to keep you occupied on rainy nights - turn off the lights, turn up the sound and let your mind roam...

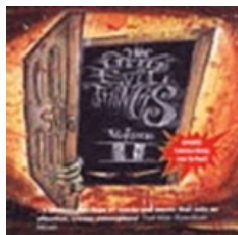
The stories vary in content, while many would be seen as reasonable for older children (13+), others do cover some marginally adult themes, I wouldn't think any of the stories is especially "adults only", except for the unduly puritan among us ! Considering the wild origins of most traditional myths and fairy tales I think these stories should be considered great entertainment for the older child who wants to stimulate their imagination. At the same time, these are not just for kids only, we loved them and we are all rather a bit older ! Little Evil things can be enjoyed by anyone from 13 to 100...

The first CD includes five great tales. Transformation offers a man's first-hand experience becoming a werewolf, while in Little Evil



Thing a woman gets more than she bargains for when she rescues a strange little creature and we should take care when dealing with the little boy with the power to control minds in *The Quiet Child*. The man with classic chase nightmares meets with a surprising end in *It's After Me!* and in *Parasites* a greedy man gets his just desserts as creatures invade his body. They are all outstanding but I must admit I enjoyed *Transformation* and *Parasites* the most, they are all very well presented and will send a shiver down your spine.

Volume II is even more impressive than the first CD. Jim McDonnell has a great voice which really tickles the backbone! *The Thing in the Jar* is a real Pandora's box tale of a strange jar which unleashes the evil inside to all who open it, while in *Sisters*, Siamese twins get the surprise of their lives as they attempt to separate. In *It's in the Water*, a man's fear of water threatens to destroy him, while in the final classic tale, *Blubb*, a giant monster made of fat terrorizes Beverly Hills. Volume II continues the same high standard as volume one and will give you some nice scares and dreams which will hang around for quite a while after listening to it...



Little Evil Things, Volume III is a real gem with great narration, dramatization and orchestration using the Moscow Symphony Orchestra, never mind the great special effects and mood sounds. I am really impressed with the way these tales balance strong plot with action and gore and yet still are remarkably friendly for younger listeners. Because there are five tales they also to achieve a lot within a short time span, these are good examples of very carefully written and executed storytelling. *Buried Alive* explores the age old fear of being buried alive and the terror of awakening in a crypt six feet under, while *It's a Boy* explores what happens when a couple's desire for a child backfires. *Freaked Out* is set under the big top, step right up and see Zemo's Big Top Freak Show, you will never be the same after. *The Dolls* explores how a doll collection



exacts its revenge on a nasty nephew, while in *The Potion*, a witch concocts a creepy brew.

Volume four continues the great success of the earlier series. Personally I think each volume brings something new and offers more and more refinement of the presentation, plot and orchestration. The fact that they are regularly using the Moscow Symphony Orchestra creates background tracks which are textured and layered, even while you are focusing on the tale, the music and sound effects are doing their job ramping up the mood.



Volume four again includes five tales, *In Lost*: A man suffers the tortures of hell in a nightmarish dream - or is it, while in *Hazardous to Your Health*: 1940's mobster gets hooked on a deadly habit. *Infection* explores how a man's life gets turned inside out when he discovers a spot on his arm while *In Your Head* considers whether those gray hairs really are what they appear to be? The final tale *The Violin's Curse* is the story of how a haunted violin comes to life. These tales again offer the best in traditional horror stories with new and modern twists, there are all the motifs you would expect in a horror story yet with intelligent plot changes, interesting re-interpretations and unusual endings.

Volume five completes the series presently available and again offers five top quality tales. Jim McDonnell once again does the job admirably with his "dark" Tom Baker like narration and the other characters, sound effects and background music are better than ever. *Whispers in the Attic* offer greetings and salutations from an old friend, while the *Happy Wanderer* tells the tale of a driver who has lost his way finds a new way home. In a rather timely tale in this modern world of the internet and computers, *O.S. 666* tells the story of a software giant creates the perfect world and in *Dreamgirl*, an unfaithful husband finds the girl of his dreams. Volume five ends with *The Impaler*, an ominous tale about the risks of unbridled science as a



mysterious creature is cloned from a fossil.

Little Evil Things are a superb series, while in the US they were released for Halloween, they are enjoyable anytime of the year. They are beautifully produced and are a classic example of the top class products which can be found by looking outside the box of "Hollywood" releases. They offer superior narration, great orchestration, awesome special sounds effects and storytelling which combines the best in traditional horror motifs with a modern sensibility.

Little Evil Things will always be on my music shelf for a rainy night.

The Little Evil Things website offers lots of background information on the series and if this review is not enough, it even includes sample mp3 tracks for you to prove to yourself they are worth purchasing.

Don't take my word for it, go to the website (<http://www.littleevilthings.com>) and listen for yourself, I am convinced you will end up placing an order in due haste. They can be purchased from the website, on Amazon and via CDBaby.com.

There is also a discount set which is comprised of Volumes I,II and III in one package. A great buy and lots of scary listening !

Evolution the Musical

R0 NTSC

Web: <http://www.evolutionthemusical.com/>

Evolution the musical is an astonishing funny journey into the debate between creationism and the scientific model of evolution. As a musical it is a cross between Hair and Rocky Horror Picture show with some of Godspell thrown in for good measure.

It has the rude, obnoxious humour of South Park and yet has strong philosophical underpinnings. It is camp, fun, irreverent and packed with shamefully catchy tunes – I found myself humming the evolution theme song for quite some time afterwards...

Evolution the musical explains the debate between creationists and evolutionists via the medium of two warring clans, the Blessed, a religious sect convinced they are descended



from Adam and Eve. Moralistic, anti sex and troubled by the concept fun they live in a secluded Church. They begin the show with their musical presentation of the Old Testament and who begat who, a rather fun rap type romp through Biblical history.

The other clan is the Beasties, a clan of humans who have only just evolved from the primates (one is still more fish than man). They are obsessed with sex and fighting and behave with wild abandon.

They present their origins in a rather nice animated piece showing the evolutionary model according to modern science with, of course, some fun quirky twists.

When one of the Blessed comes of age, their leader, worried about her possible interest in leaving the community, goes into the jungle with a holy shot gun, especially designed for the purpose and appended with a crucifix, to kill the head of the Beasties.

The Beasties petty squabbles and fun time focused on sex turns of revenge and they raid the church and take blasphemous revenge in true pagan fashion !



This leads to an all out war including a rare appearance by both Jesus and Charles Darwin !!

What can solve the dilemma ? Even Jesus and Darwin fail and they begin to fight each other, however, when love arises between a Blessed and a Beastie things begin to change, but can they both evolve enough to save the human race ? We will have to see.

This is a hilarious musical, nicely presented with animation, great to save the human race ? We will have to see.

This is a hilarious musical, nicely presented with animation, great dance numbers and characters it is hard to forget. It reminds me of a hippy musical updated to a 2008 post modern feel. I thoroughly enjoyed it and certainly liked the way it poked fun at all manner of ideologues, religious and secular !

There is lots of information on the website include background on the creators, crew and development of the musical as well as galleries, a number of video clip and other content.

The Hallowing Autumn Tears Dark Symphonies Productions

Autumn Tears has been a highly successful "gothic" band for some years, experimenting with both darkwave and neoclassical elements in all their major releases. The Hallowing is quite a change and is truly evocative and unique album, it has more in common with classical or chamber music pieces and yet still embodies the dark, melancholic vision that is uniquely Autumn Tears.

While The Hallowing clearly draws inspiration



from such traditional sources as Bach. Brahms. Hayden, Mahler and many others, it is not in any way derivative. It is a textured and masterful release offering a wide range of different compositions. While some of the tracks have a certain "soundtrack" sound, others are more like Opera, certainly Haus' vocals add a unique touch to the album.

"The Hallowing" employs fully live authentic classical instrumentation including a live string section, woodwinds, oboe, French horn and haunting, operatic vocals. In addition to the band, there are a host of guest musicians adding French horn, oboe, violin, viola, and harp, giving the ten songs here a healthy dose of classical flavor.

Originally planned to be strictly limited to 1000 copies worldwide, the album sold out within three weeks and due to an overwhelming demand, Dark Symphonies decided to officially re-release the album.

It is great to see this unique album reach a wider audience, it is a delicate, melancholic and sophisticated release which will have a pride of place in my personal library and I certainly recommend you get a copy for yours as well !

Web: <http://www.darksymphonies.com>

**Intimations of Sorrow
Valerian
City Canyon Records
Indie CDs Australia
www.indie-cds.com**



Valerian sound like a well established rock band with catchy tunes, solid guitar work and intriguing lyrics. Then why haven't you heard of them? Well, these five rather gifted musicians hail from Finland and it takes a while to get an audience in the West.

While Finland is probably better known for its heavy metal, this is an impressive change, solid rock, certainly with metal influences, but melodic and polished and showing an amazing maturity in both musical ability and lyricism, especially for a second album. Olli Koskela, the lead singer, offers great vocals with an impressive range, he has a great rock and roll voice which easily manages to move

between grudge to flights of metal, ballads to harder rock.

The music itself covers the spectrum of rock but does seem to have a certain 80's hardrock/metal resonance, songs range from ballads to anthems but many seem to have a certainly angst ridden ambiance.

The lyrics are not "throw away" and clearly have something to say ranging from personal reflections on love and loss such as Home-sick to the rather dark serial killer song "Nothing Will Ever Take Me Away From You".

There are many stand out tracks but Liar is quite an astounding ballad which is not only musically adventurous but loaded with intense emotion and intelligent, even socially aware lyrics !

(This is My) Letter to the World **Sarah June**

Sarah June is a singer-songwriter from Detroit, Michigan. She has been singing as well as playing piano and guitar since childhood. In high school she began writing songs inspired by life as she experiences it and the industrial wasteland by which she is surrounded. When she was 18 she began to perform in Chicago and Detroit, and put together an EP called "three-quarter view" in 2001. Currently she lives in San Francisco.



Still inspired by bleak urban landscapes, and the loneliness and alienation that lurks within us all, she spent this past year writing songs that she compiled into her debut album: "This Is My Letter To The World".

Her inspiration comes from such figures as Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath, Ray Bradbury, and Gwendolyn Brooks and this clearly shows in her lyrics.

She recorded and edited all of the songs alone in her apartment to preserve the uniqueness of the recordings.

All of the songs on this album are textured and layered, offering delicate atmospheric melodies which evoke the story she is telling.

June offers us ten original compositions ac-

companied by two well-chosen covers (Prince's "When Doves Cry" and a stunning version of Elvis' "I Can't Help Falling in Love with You .")

This is a melancholic yet beautifully haunting album

Web: <http://www.darkhollerarts.com>

Midnight Syndicate

13th Hour

Out of the Darkness

(Retrospective: 1994-1999)

Web: <http://www.midnightsyndicate.com>

13th Hour

Haverghast Mansion is an eerie haunted Victorian Mansion which has decayed through neglect and decay and is the virtual home for the music of the 13th Hour by Midnight Syndicate. The 13th Hour is an unusual soundscape which is unlike most traditional albums. It is a blend of superb orchestration, sound effects, textured layers of sound and, of course, the influence of horror movie music.



It is powerful and evocative, each track spinning it's tale, evoking and conjuring images and sensations. As each track communicates a different message the form of the music changes with different tempos, instruments and moods. Whether it be the subtle mood of Mansion in the Mist to the more powerful horror themes of later tracks, the album is a superbly evocative.

It is powerful and evocative, each track spinning it's tale, evoking and conjuring images and sensations. As each track communicates a different message the form of the music changes with different tempos, instruments and moods. Whether it be the subtle mood of Mansion in the Mist to the more powerful horror themes of later tracks, the album is a superbly evocative.

With horror music it always difficult to avoid clichés and sounding too much like a "Hammer Horror film track", Midnight syndicate offers a sophisticated exploration of the horror genre which will certainly send a tingle up your spine and keep you entertained at the same time.

Out of the Darkness

Retrospective:

1994-1999

Out of the Darkness is a retrospective CD from Midnight Syndicate, it is a little different from their other albums in that rather than

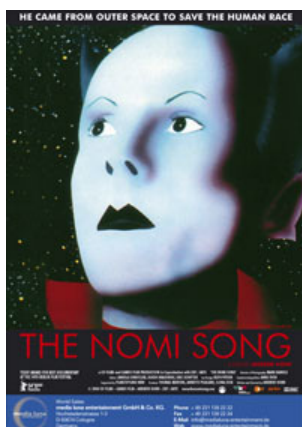
following a story line it offers favourite tracks of the band and fans re-mastered for this CD.



This is a superb way to gain an introduction to the textured gothic feel of Midnight Syndicate's work, it offers a great selection of impressive tracks selected from their CDs issued between their CDs issued between 1994-1999. There are also some previously unreleased tracks such as "The Dead Matter" and "Journey into Dementia".

Like all of their work, each song tells a story through careful orchestration, subtle textured sound and evocative sound effects. After listening to this CD you will certainly want to get their other releases...

The Nomi Song
A film By Andrew
Horn
Media Luna
Entertainment
www.medialuna-entertainment.de



Klaus Nomi was an enigmatic 1980s new wave singer who seems to have vanished from history. He was a flamboyant, stylish diva who mixed all manner of styles into a unique stage persona. His image was quite unique - an alien presence mixed with German decadence, Opera with New Wave, images from 1950's Science Fiction with gender bending androgyny.

He presented himself as a new wave opera singer from another world and certainly looked the part, he achieved quite some fame, even notoriety, yet because he was so much of an outsider, history has not been especially kind. The Nomi Song tries to remedy this injustice and achieves so admirably, this is a marvelous documentary and a emotional experience.

It is sad to think that such an artiste, one of the first celebrities to die of AIDS, has not been more remembered. In many ways this



film is a reflection of the fear that gripped the gay community during the first waves of AIDS deaths.

(Then only known as the Gay cancer) Nomi was invited by David Bowie to perform on Saturday Night Live, which skyrocketed his popularity in Europe and New York. However, in a sad twist of fate, just as he was gaining the recognition of his craft, he was diagnosed with AIDS and died the following year.

The end of the film is emotionally painful and reminds us of the terror many felt during the earliest stages of the AIDS epidemic. It is particularly moving to hear three of his closest friends recall his last days, and how they failed to visit him as he was dying due to their own fear and torment. These interviews are hard to forget and I reflected on them for many days following watching this film.

At the same time, this is not a morbid documentary; there is balance between the sadness of his death and issues surrounding AIDS with the beauty and glamour of his unusual life and stage persona.

The film traces Nomi's birth in Germany during World War II and how his childhood obsession with opera (especially Maria Callas) inspired the evolution of his stage persona into a performing alien sent from outer space to save the human race.

His stage act combined performance art and music and became a significant part of the New Wave movement in Greenwich Village, New York. Nomi, not surprisingly, gained an

immediate cult following and signed a deal with a major European record label.

The catchy tunes and bizarre outsider lyrics struck a chord with so many listeners, as did his striking image.

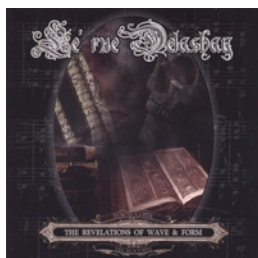
The image of a gender variant being from another planet, alone and alienated on planet earth has so many resonances within the life experience of many people of the time and to a great extent still does today. His message of loss and difference still reverberates through time.

This fascinating film is packed with interviews with Nomi's friends and collaborators and gives an intimate glimpse of both the stage persona Nomi and the man himself Klaus Sperber. Interviews include performance artist Ann Magnuson and painter Kenny Scharf, who befriended the singer while he lived in New York.

The music on the DVD is superb and includes four remixes of Nomi songs by electronic artists influenced by Nomi's work. Other extras on the disc give background on the New Wave musical movement from which Nomi emerged and further information on Nomi himself.

This is a powerful and moving documentary; it is presented in a unique way which avoids narration and external comment and allows the footage and interviews to speak for itself. This allows the viewer to really experience the life, vision and dreams of Nomi and the loss caused by his early death. Andrew Horn is to be commended for creating such a unique documentary experience.

The Revelations of Wave and Form Theatrikil Productions Le' Rue Delashay



The Revelations of Wave & Form is truly a series of gothic "revelations". Each piece seems to resonate with darkness and night and offers a deep evocation of mood and sense. Delashay's use of classical music is in many ways ironic, he turns it against itself and creates a unique ambiance which is powerful and awe inspiring.

There are certainly many "dark" musicians on the market, but many seem to be "show men" or simply "skin deep Goths", this is truly intense, brooding music which awakens the senses in a profound manner.

What makes Delashay stand head and shoulders above the rest is his immense talent as a musician, a classical musician at that, and his ability to transform that form into something which is uniquely diabolical.

Delashay's rendition of 'Battle Hymn of The Apocalypse', Anton LaVey's signature piece is superb and a fitting tribute to a very unique man while He Rides Through Hallow's Eye is a superb journey through the country on the darkest of nights, evocatively executed and written with a fierce pace which certainly enlivens the mood.

Piano Sonata in C#m, Op. 143 is an astounding piano piece which really shows Delashay's skills, it is fast, beautifully executed and absolutely magnificent.

There is also a great movie clip (in quicktime) on the CD of the Battle Hymn of The Apocalypse in suitably ritualistic style, a superb black and white film clip which certainly embodies the power and satanic majesty of the piece.

I could continue praising the CD but it would seem overkill, I would like to leave some tracks for you to explore yourself ! There are fourteen tracks in all and each one offers something different. I could not find one track I did not like ! In my mind this is a truly impressive release from Delashay and I heartily recommend it.

Web: <http://www.leruedelashay.com>

Slope Steve Jansen Samadhi Sound

Steve Jansen will not be a familiar name unless you have an interest in '80s art pop or spend time checking who plays backing instruments on experimental music albums. Jansen is David Sylvian's brother, Sylvian being the lead singer of Japan and, since the early '80s, has developed quite a reputation as



an innovative and creative solo artist.

Jansen has played drums and percussion on many of his brother's releases, as well as working with other ex-members of Japan in a variety of guises. This, however, is a unique Solo album from Jansen in which he has harnessed support from many around him.

Featuring guest vocalists who include his brother and long-time collaborator David Sylvian, and the sublime Nina Kinert, it is a beautiful electronic album featuring a range of different sounds; it is textured, minimalist and delicate.

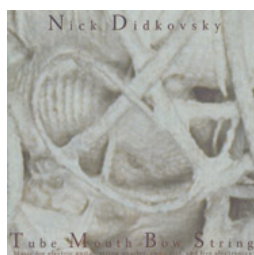
The album opens with Grip, a minimalist saxophone and synth symphony, shot through towards the end with subtle voices. Then we have the sleeplike sound of Sleepyard offering the superb vocals of Tim Elsenburg and a range of tracks which explore a variety of textures and sounds, with the expert use of atmospheric instrumentals creating a truly luxurious listening experience.

Gap of Cloud is light and floats away and a Way of Disappearing is haunting with a clarinet which seem to resonate long after it has been played.

Slope is a nicely structured album moving carefully through different textures and forms; it slowly envelops you in its atmosphere until you quietly drift away with its ambience. This is a intriguing and innovative CD.

Web: <http://www.samadhisound.com>

Tube Mouth Bow String
Nick Didkovsky
Pogus Productions
Australia: Indie CDs
www.indie-cds.com



Nick Didkovsky is primarily known for being the central figure of the US avant-rock ensemble Doctor Nerve. While this band has achieved quite notable success Didkovsky has discussed in various interviews his desire to explore less commercial and more experimental work, hence Tube Mouth Bow String.

This is an interesting exploration of the use of electric guitar with a string quartet and sup-

plemented with computers and electronica. It is not as experimental and difficult as many of the other titles distributed by Pogus.

Indeed it has a certain addictive quality which you get into after many listenings, this still requires an open minded view to music and a willingness to explore beyond the mainstream. However, it is a choice which will be well rewarded.

Each of the tracks is quite unique and beautifully recorded. In my mind the most impressive is track 3: Tube Mouth Bow String which is 12.27 long and really develops the texture of Didkovsky's work, its uses of strings, pedals and talk boxes accentuate the beauty and the presence of the piece. The other pieces are all unique in their own right and offered textured and creative explorations.

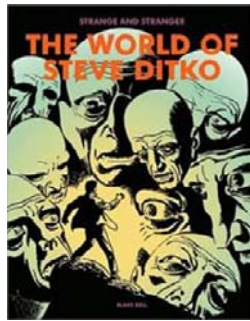
I especially like CD insert which is rich with background and notes that are quite useful for truly appreciating the tracks, it even includes Web addresses which can assist listeners enrich their experience of this music and explore further into new territory.

This is a fascinating exploration of the interaction between the precision of computers and electronica and the spontaneity of instruments such as guitars and strings, it is a rewarding experience if you spend some time with it.



ART REVIEWS

**Strange & Stranger:
The World of Steve
Ditko**
Blake Bell
Fantagraphics Books
www.fantagraphics.com



After the astonishing success of the Spider-Man movies, Stan Lee became a household name. At the same time, not enough people realized that there was another artist just as important to the development of this pop culture icon and his name was Steve Ditko. Ditko was, and is, somewhat of an enigma, he is a very private person, indeed, he has not offered any interviews or appeared at any comic book conventions since the 1960's! He is also dedicated to the objectivist vision of Ayn Rand and her vision of the world as expounded in *Atlas Shrugged* and the *Fountainhead* and ended up being isolated from much of the fame (and dollars) associated with the Spiderman phenomenon. He clearly was and is a very sensitive and talented artist who finds the dichotomy between creativity and commercialism difficult if not impossible to reconcile.

It could also be said, it didn't help that Stan Lee took all the credit for the development of Spiderman leading to Ditko parting ways with him just as Spiderman was hitting the big time in the early Sixties. While Ditko continued to work, even in the 80's and 90's he never really trusted the corporate comics industry and certainly was never really acknowledged for the pivotal role he played in the development of comic book style. Perhaps *Strange & Stranger: The World of Steve Ditko* in offering a comprehensive examination of his life and work, written as it is by Ditko scholar Blake Bell, will at least readdress some of this imbalance.

While Ditko gave Spiderman his distinctive look, we should not consider this his only achievement, regardless of its significance. In my mind what is more important is his astonishing 50 year career in comics and graphic illustration and his creativity as an artist.

This superb volume has been skillfully written to appeal to the widest possible audience,



even those who do not have an overriding interest in comics, will find the his life story, his experience as an artist and his role in the development of Spiderman a fascinating read. While those who know Ditko as one of the most innovative comic book artists of the last century will be thrilled with the extensive coverage given to the development of his style, rare examples of his comics and background on publishers, the comic book industry and his life.

The biography of Steve Ditko is a fascinating read, Bell's writing style is such that it draws us into his life and helps us appreciate how he developed as an artist and an individual. From his most humble childhood in Pennsylvania; to the dizzying heights of co-creating Spider-Man and leaving it all beheld as he walked away from the Spiderman franchise, it's all there. We also again insight into his determination, perfectionism and above all, his dedication to his art form.

We should also not forget the coverage given to the development of his unique style. *Strange & Stranger* documents his earlier influences and his experiences working with low budget comic book companies as well his experimentation with all genres of comic books. Through a lifetime of creative effort he evolved a visual talent which broke all the rules of traditional comic book art and made him one of the most innovative in his field. Ditko's evolution as an artist is well represented with a wide range of black and white and colour comics, nearly every page offers some form of illustration, including many full page excerpts from his various series.

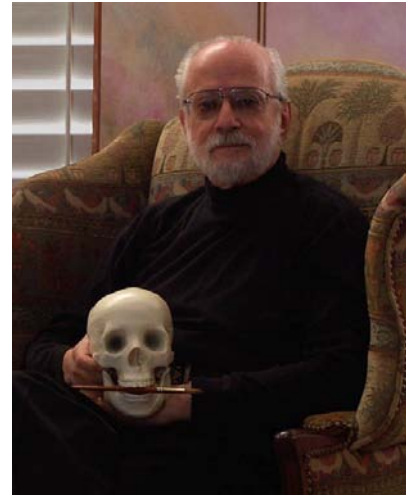
This is an impressive, high quality hardback, illustrated throughout and edited in such a way as to offer a good balance between biography, technical information and nicely reproduced comics and illustrations.

THE HAUNTED STUDIO OF LEWIS BARRETT LEHRMAN

The concept of the Haunted House is as old as mankind itself. In literature on the concept of “the Holy” it is argued that primitive man put aside certain sacred locations and these were seen as “Hallowed” ground, separate from normal tribal property and open to the “divine”. At this stage of man’s developments the “divine” was a nebulous concept and of course covered everything from tree and animal spirits to those of storms and place. This concept of the Holy was marked by such emotions and fear and awe and was just as much about terror and dread as about joy and reverence. In many ways the early foundations for haunted locations were laid at this very early stage. As mankind developed some of the earliest folk-tales and stories resonated with images of ghosts, spirits and haunted locations, ranging from natural environs to houses. Some of the earliest tales from the Indian Purana’s and Agama’s are filled with spirits, ghosts, dark temples and haunted domains.

Haunting is traditionally used as a plot device in both gothic and horror fiction. Roman-era authors Titus Maccius Plautus, Pliny the Younger, and Lucian wrote stories about haunted houses, and more modern authors from Henry James to Clive Barker and Stephen King have featured them in their writings. Traditional ghost stories, especially those of Europe and later America, reveled in the image of the Haunted House, certainly the Gothic novel used it as a central motif. The Castle of Otranto by Horace Walpole, written in 1764 is considered the very first Gothic novel and is the forerunner of most later horror tales, it used an old castle as its nexus and this model continued into such tales as Dracula.

In modern tales the Haunted House has ranged from a decaying castle to the modern home, which while seeming to be the centre of domestic bliss is actually the seat of some unknown evil, this can be especially seen in such films as the Amityville Horror, House and Poltergeist. While these images may resonate in film, the most common icon of the Haunted House comes from Hollywood and such films as the Hammer Classics.



It is hard to actually pin down the iconography of haunting, it seems to dwell in old buildings, Victorian mansions with secret passages, moonlit vistas, shimmering half light and mist.

This is where Lewis Barrett Lehrman comes in. He is a veteran graphic artist and illustrator and professional watercolorist, he is also the author of six books on art for artists. His website has been in operation since 1989 offering Haunted House paintings.

Lehrman began his career as a fine artist began back in 1984, following over twenty-five years in graphic design and illustration. The question we may ask is how did he come to undertake such an unusual career choice, let’s let him answer in his own words...

“How did I become interested in painting the haunted world? I trace it back to the summer of 1944, the year I turned eleven! That was when my aunt and uncle invited me to spend a month with them on a mid-western farm. I was a New York city kid, a budding artist even then, and to say I was excited at making the trip -- by myself!! -- on an overnight Pullman sleeper train to Battle Creek, Michigan, would be understating my feelings by quite a bit. Sleepless with excitement, I spent that night, nose pressed to the window, gazing out at moonlit farmlands, lonely houses lit by solitary lights, as we rolled past in the darkness. They’re images I remember to this day, so it was only natural that I’d be drawn to painting the night. From painting the night it was a short hop to Halloween.



Through the mid '80's and into the early '90's, my wife and I owned an art gallery which featured my work as well as that of other artists. Night scenes -- and then Halloween scenes -- were always popular subjects. The more I painted them, the more they sold. And people loved them! Today, many of them live on mainly in memory, as they have long since left my world.

Those were the years before the Internet, high quality scanning and digital giclée (high quality ink-jet) printing, and all the technology which we take for granted today, all of which have now made it possible to produce incredibly faithful reproductions in small quantities, and which also helped make The Haunted Studio possible.

These days, The Haunted Studio and its activities occupy a great deal of my creative time. I have come to think of myself as "Painter of Dark."

The Haunted Studio currently offers some forty one paintings, available as fine-art-quality prints in varied sizes, at very affordable prices. The quality of these prints are truly impressive. Each reproduction is printed on 100% cotton fiber fine art paper, which has a soft white surface and texture that is close to the original watercolor paper. Each subject is carefully printed, signed and numbered, and is carefully rolled and shipped in a sturdy mailing tube.

Lehrman has worked exceptionally hard to make available the highest quality product and each print also includes an outline on the back suggested framing ideas etc.



He has a strong sense of customer service and what he offers and the way he responds to enquiries and supplies his goods cannot be faulted.

Haunted House Notecards

The Haunted Studio also offers a range of Haunted House Notecards, these are superb reproductions in high quality, they are great Halloween cards but can also be used for birthdays, holidays, really, anytime ! (They are supplied with envelopes)

There are a wide selection available in various series including Jessica Concluded That This Place Promised, Midnight In The Treehouse of Good and Evil, Sweets For The Sweet? Tilted Angel, Thirteen Spooks, Maybe More, The Pumpkin Sellers' Halloween and Strange Light.

How about your Own Haunted House ?

Have you ever wondered how your own house (or maybe the house you grew up in), might look in the moonlight, perhaps with strange light emanating from an attic window, maybe with some spooky faces peering from behind the curtains in a darkened room, perhaps with some trick-or-treaters (you? your children?) on the front walk?

Lehrman offers commissions to create your own the way you would dream it to be (in your nightmares, of course !).

You can see some examples at:
<http://www.hauntedstudio.com/your.htm>

Again, Lehrmann offers the ultimate in customer service, while you pay a deposit (refundable), the rest is not due until you are totally satisfied with the result. I cannot think of an artist who has more consideration of his customers

The Haunted Studio Website

The Haunted Studio website offers all sorts of information about Lewis Barrett Lehrman's art works, these are three pages full of images in his gallery which offer good sized images of each print and full background to each. I love the fact that you can get the background story of each print; let us take The Ghosts of Black Mountain farm as an example.

There is a large image of the print, background story and details of sizes available: Large Format, Medium Format, Small Format and (soon) in Premiere Limited Edition. Let's get the feeling for this print...

Ghosts of Black Mountain Farm

They came to America when the nation was young. Hard working farmers, they headed west, paused their wagons on this spot, and knew it to be the very place they had dreamed of.

A sod hut was their first home, and that first spring, they turned the soil, planted, tilled, harvested their crops, and tended their chickens and lambs. A sturdy cabin soon replaced that sod hut, as the family grew. Here they lived, here they worked and began to prosper. Years passed. They celebrated each birth, sent sons to defend their new homeland, mourned each passing, and interred their dead in the grove behind the cabin.

Following The War Between The States, the family decided to build a grand Victorian mansion upon the site of that original sod hut.

They named it "Black Mountain Farm," in memory of the distant land from which their forefathers had arrived nearly a century ago.

As generations died, they were laid to rest in the little graveyard: the old, and sometimes, sadly, the young.

They thought it would last forever, their paradise on the prairie, but another war came, then the dust bowl years, then yet another war. And another.

This generation's youth, its ambitions kindled by the hardships of farming or by the allure of the college campus, departed, never to return.



Finally, there came a time when none remained to fill the vacant rooms, to love and maintain Black Mountain Farm, and thus it was abandoned to the mercy of prairie winters, vandalism, and decay.

Now, as dusk descends and a chill wind hisses softly through the withered prairie grass, only the ghosts of Black Mountain Farm stand watch, drifting soundlessly down moldering hallways, through the forgotten graveyard, or peering from the gathering shadows.

But what of that light in the attic window?

There is also a free newsletter called "The Halloweenist". It is a great free newsletter showing prints in preparation, news, art being worked on and all sorts of other interesting tidbits.

There is a lot to look at The Haunted Studio website, lots to read and enjoy and some great prints, postcards and more.

It is a great embodiment of the feeling we all so much enjoy when we see a ghost film or read a horror tale, that sense of both fun and a tinge of fear, the memory of being scared as a child and enjoying it.

Lewis Barrett Lehrman is a great artist, a dark visionary and dedicated to customer satisfaction, I am sure you will find something you want on his site !

The Haunted House Studio

Lewis Barrett Lehrman

Web: <http://www.hauntedstudio.com>

Prints

Postcards

Commissions of your Own Haunted Home !

THE DARK NEO-SYMBOLIST VISIONS OF JOHN SANTERINEROSS



John Santerineross is a New York based "image maker" who has been referred to by the media as "the world's leading neo-symbolist photographer of our time." He creates works which stimulate and disturb, they have a dreamlike quality which crosses boundaries, they explore a dark unconscious realm where dreams and nightmares freely mix.

His development as an artist always focused on finding boundaries and crossing them. He began as a ceramist creating decorative abstractions but soon found this medium to be too limiting and then moved on, he then took to painting incorporating photographs cut from magazines and newspapers, but again he felt constrained and moved on. His present works are his most adventurous and perhaps his most personally revealing.

His images are uniquely created by the careful staging of the image rather than the use of digital manipulation.

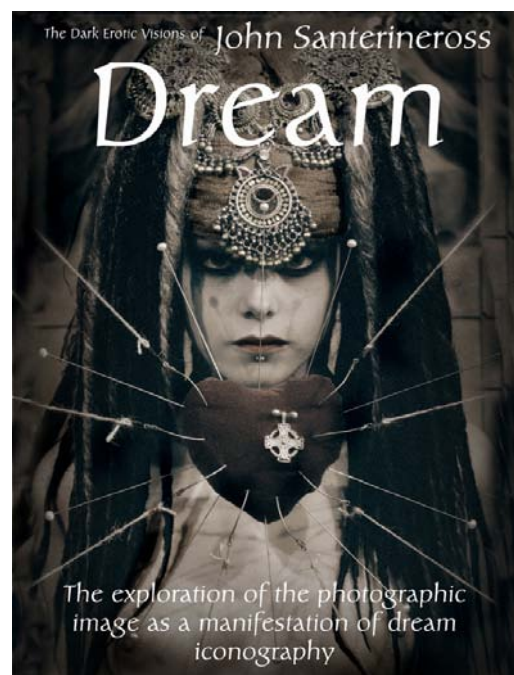
He carefully works to construct an elaborate "set" which express a dark vision through the textured use of all manner of props and stage items. It is quite an amazing process as he methodologically brings his own dream into reality and then transmits this to us through his photographs. It is difficult to really call his work photography as I feel this distracts from

the intensity of their presentation; they are really works of art which have simply been captured via the photographic medium.

At times I think they are more like magical conjurations recorded on film ! His work explores the unconscious world of dark eroticism where taboos are there to be contravened rather and the forbidden is just another form to be explored.

After forcing fans to wait for five years, Santerineross offers another powerful exploration of dark erotic art entitled "Dream". This sequel to "Fruit of the Secret God" which is now a rare high priced collectable explores the world of symbolism, mixing what could be perceived to be the sacred and the profane, the permitted and the taboo.

The images presented are beautifully reproduced in a superbly high quality 9" x 12" hard-cover book. Dream includes some 120 full color pages, of which 50 are new images not seen before. These range from the erotic and provocative to the transgressive and forbidden, none of these images are quite as they first seem and as you examine them again and again you notice new things and reflect deeper on their meaning.





Dream also includes an introduction by underground erotic writer, Nina Hugo and a short story written by artist and writer Bethalynne Bajema.

Santerineross' work has a strong gothic feel, indeed four of his images have been used as album covers for the Goth band Attrition. At the same time it would be incorrect to put him into the "clichéd goth category", his work stands by itself, unique and authentic, exploring dark themes with a mixture of eroticism, religious imagery and gothic themes which evoke a deep unconscious resonance from those who see them. It is impossible to pigeon hole Santerineross, his work simply stands as it is and needs to be experienced to be understood.

In addition to Dream, Santerineross has released quite a fascinating DVD. It offer four different elements of his work:

A slideshow displaying all 50 images from his latest book, Dream.

An additional slideshow displays all the images from his first book, Fruit of the Secret God. This is quite a find since this book is now long out of print and fetching very high prices.

A dark yet beautiful multimedia presentation created by musician and composer David Sussmann.

This presentation combines music composed by Sussmann especially for this presentation.

The final item is a real gem. It is Santerineross' first short art film, entitled "Child, Doll or Bone"- a disturbingly beautiful look into the



mind of a "cutter". It is deeply evocative and embodies the very essence of his work. Each DVD also includes a bonus post card.

I would also recommended the John Santerineross website, its presentation is a work of art embodying many aspects of his dark vision, it is filled with all sorts of fascinating content including a very generous selection of his images in the gallery. The film and multimedia section also offers a selection of films including the powerful "Child, Doll or Bone" available in quicktime.

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There is a regular news section and, of course, a store from which we highly recommend you purchase a copy of Dream and his DVD, these will not be available forever and Dream is likely to end up a rare and treasured dark art book for those lucky enough to get a copy, so buy one quick !

TOYS AND COLLECTIBLES

Teddy Scares

Series I and II Bears & Accessories

Applehead Factory

Web: <http://www.teddyscares.com/>

Teddy Scares were once warm and cuddly, they are now dead and bloody. These are beautiful yet horrible Teddy Bears, bears who after death have become warped after being mistreated and forgotten by their owners. They are zombie Teddy Bears superbly made, terribly disfigured and utterly collectable. The line original made its debut in 2003 with both 12" and 6" morgue mini bears.

In the second series, there are five 12" bears which come nicely packaged in well constructed window boxes. They all have very marketable names - Eli Wretch, Granger Evermore, Mazey Podge, Mundy Drudge, and Sheldon Grogg. Each bear comes with his or her own history, back story and personal data that provides information like their date of death, hobbies, favorite colors, and other relevant facts about their life journey.

Granger Evermore for example, died 1st September 1931 and yearns to be anywhere but here. His hobby is collecting calendars and his past occupation was a tattoo artist.

His favorite drink is water with a twang of asbestos. If you listen close enough you will hear him whisper "When I get out of this hole, you will suffer a thousand times my pain."

Granger is a captive of his own evil deeds, the voices in his head constantly reminds him what he is. He tries to find redemption in himself, a task far out of reach. His body is his jail cell, trapped behind the steel bars and barbed wire of his mind.



Sheldon Grogg died 27th May 1940, his favourite scent is Lavendar and he likes Chamomile tea with curdled milk for a nightcap.

His dream occupation is a Sleep Therapist and he loves to nap floating on black clouds of pollution. Disturbingly, he is comforted by the moans caused by horrible nightmares.

Sheldon has spent a lifetime of trudging through the darkness in the hopes of finding something more. Restless and groggy he roams past the bedrooms of sleeping children.

He searches for his special resting spot, looking to find a companion to hold him tight and tell him he is loved. Loneliness is so tiring it can drive one insane.

The quality of these bears is astounding, made to exacting standards with perverse extras such as a grog bottles, hearts in a bag and related accessories !

You can join the Teddy Scares club to gain extra to all sorts of extras such as an exclusive Granger Evermore 12" Plush, (Limited to 2,900 Pieces) , "I Don't Like You." Rita Mortis t-shirt, personalized Membership ID Card, the annual Fan Club Newsletter , a Teddy Scares Membership Certificate and access to the Members Only Web Area.

There are also graphic novels and calendars you can share with your scare bear !

Latest news is that they are developing a short animated film in production with voiceovers from Linda Blair of Exorcist fame and Clive Barker.

TWITCH THE RACCOON

Road Kill Toys

Web: <http://www.roadkilltoys.com/>

Roadkill is a new designer toy boutique, creating original toy characters, however these are not your run of the mill plus toys, they are toys with a very dark twist, indeed, as dark as you can imagine. These toys have been run over, squashed, disemboweled - they are road kill. According to the designers, they are in a genre of toys uniquely their own - Squash-Plush.

This superb macabre range of collectibles begins with Twitch the Raccoon and what a beauty he is. He is superbly, if not grotesquely made, all the plush materials and stuffing used are made from 100% polyester fibres and hence are safe (for the body, but for the mind – I'm not so sure !). Twitch's body is stuffed with a mixture of beads and stuffing, the beads give the Squash-plush teddy a bit of extra weight, so he can lie spread-eagled in his blood and gut-pool. The blood and guts and gore are made using the latest, cutting edge stuffing. It's a special new micro-bead stuffing that gives the guts and organs a more malleable, tactile effect. But that's not all, you can disembowel and re-embowel Twitch to your heart's desire through the zips that line both sides of the teddy's carcass. He also comes in his own body bag so he's got somewhere nice to sleep ! (Okay, I not sure if a dead Raccoon sleeps, but is a nice place to store him anyway and its keeps his carcass clean.)

Twitch the Raccoon is not some little twee collectables, he measures some 15 inches from nose to tail, and 10 inches from out-stretched paw to paw. In the middle he flattens out to 2 inches high with the blood and guts stuffed in, and 1 inch high with them out. He weighs about 350 grams. That's a lot of plush toy for your buck. He certainly makes a statement when on display.



The various components of Twitch the Raccoon are impressively realistic, I especially like his bloodshot eye !



The teddy body-bag is made from an translucent plastic so you can see the gore inside. It has a white zipper down the middle. And it's 14.5 inches long by 11 inches wide. With a bit of prodding and pounding, it just allows enough space for a run over raccoon with his guts hanging out.

This is one awesome plush toy. It is unique with nothing on the market even remotely like it. It is made to the highest quality and so dark, so bizarre and off the wall that it will shock your friends and offend fuzzy wuzzy toy lovers. At the same time it will be the pride of joy in any gothic and horror lover's collection.

Roadkill have also just released a new model, Grind, so go to the website and have a look.

The first 1000 Grinds come with limited edition tags so if you don't want to miss out, visit <http://www.roadkilltoys.com/> and get one today. While you are there check out the Viral video and other fun extras !

So these toys don't get lonely they have another friend coming soon - Splodge the Hedgehog.



SIDESHOW COLLECTIBLES: SAW DOLL

Sideshow Collectibles

Web: <http://www.sideshowcollectibles.com>

The Saw films have been quite a phenomenon, beginning as a low budget Australian horror, they have skyrocketed to the heights of Hollywood fame without losing their sharp edge and dark content. In 2008 we are heading towards the fifth in the series and so far so good, each one has had something new to add to the story and new traps to taunt and horrify. They are not for the faint of heart and feature strong psychological terror as well as graphic horror elements. It is all the more impressive in that the terror created is not from some supernatural element or unknown commodity, but from a human being tortured by disease and the injustice he sees around him.

At times you can even identify with the sadness and alienation Jigsaw feels but then his cruelty kicks in and you are shocked back into reality. This process of identification and then horror and being able to view the firm through both the killers and victims perspective is what makes the Saw franchise so successful.

As anyone who has seen the films will remember, victims of the Jigsaw Killer (Jonathan Kramer played so well by Tobin Bell) must choose between life and death, but it is not that simple. They must suffer greatly to avoid inevitable death.

His subjects are captured and awaken after a drug induced sleep. As they struggle to overcome their confusion and the fear induced by their new surroundings, they receive a message that explains the failures of their lives and what they must do to pass the tests set in front of them, many of these tests involve self mutilation or committing murder. If they fail



the test, they die, there is no mercy and no easy escape.

The Jigsaw does not communicate directly, he speaks through a strange and creepy ventriloquist dummy with a pale white face, dark eyes and vivid red markings on its cheeks.

Central to the Saw series, this vinyl doll from Sideshow Collectibles is a rare commodity. It is a limited edition of 150 and is made to exacting standards. It stands some 15" tall and is built on a vinyl doll body capable of sitting and standing poses. The arms have a clever rotating swivel joint at the elbows that allow bent arm or straight arm poses, and the figure is ball-jointed at the neck, shoulders, and hips.

The doll is incredibly lifelike, it is nicely dressed in a black suit with a red bowtie, white shirt and bright red shiny shoes. His hair is soft and very realistic. This, of course, makes him all the more terrifying; his is so lovely and yet so terrible at the same time. He is a great addition to any dark collection.

There are a limited number of these rare items still in stock.

THE SYNERGY COMPENDIUM—SIDESHOW COLLECTIBLES SAW COMPETITION

For Entry Details - See Page 11

BATMAN: DARK KNIGHT COLLECTIBLES



Popbox Collectibles

Web: <http://www.popboxcollectibles.com>

Batman: The Dark Knight has surpassed all box office records and become a major phenomenon. While Batman has always attracted a large following, the recent release with its unique portrayal of The Joker by the late Heath Ledger and its intelligent plot and action packed style has taken the world by storm, selling out theatres throughout the US on first release. Indeed, The Dark Knight has become the fastest film in history to pass 400 million dollars at the North American box office, according to recent cinema sales figures.

It seems director Christopher Nolan's follow-up to 2005's Batman Begins follows in the footsteps of a darker vision of Batman and brings a gritty and edgy presentation to the Joker which will be hard to top.

Batman has always been a phenomenon, in comics books, earlier series, earlier films, books, cartoons and of course, in the latest blockbusters. What is interesting is that Batman has always attracted a wide audience from the younger to older, science fiction and "gothic" film lovers, to those attracted to comics and superheroes, he really does have something for everyone.

Popbox Collectibles has released a wide range of products to celebrate the release of Batman: The Dark Knight, there is a diverse range with something to suit everyone's budget. From high end LCD Watches and Bat Logo Mp3 players to patches, magnets and smaller items. It is on these smaller items we shall focus this review.

One of their first is a series of very collectible embroidered iron-on patches in five styles. Each patch is around 8cm in size and packaged



in an open window box with iron-on instructions included.

This is the first time such patches have been made available and themes include Batman, Joker, Gotham Police, movie logo and Dark Knight City.

They are also quite unique in their construction including printed vinyl, lenticular effect and reflective silver PU materials.

They will look great on everything from jeans to shirts, to bags and backpacks.

Another part of their range is a series of five three dimensional magnets released in five styles.

These are quite sizeable little items (each one 5-6 cm) and are nicely packaged. They are very realistic 3D sculptures of Batman, Joker, Tumbler and logo blue and red versions.





The Q-Blox are a rather unusual adaptation of the Batman image, it is unique to PopBox and is an articulated 5cm Q-Blox figure. They are very cute and come in three styles and can be exchanged between a dangler and/or keychain.



They are surprisingly detailed being made of durable hard PVC and fitting some 15 points of articulation in 5cm is quite some achievement !

A nice little collectible in the "boys own category" i.e. the car range is the Mini pull-back Batman vehicles, these come in two styles with exchangeable dangler and keychain.



Each vehicle is just 4cm in size and comes packaged on a blister card. They are the smallest pull back vehicles on the market and yet include a high quality wind up mechanism for lots of power and are made to a study standard for long life.

These are just some of the fun Batman:Dark Knight releases from PopBox, others include charms, a small Bat Sign Torch (works best at about 2 metres) and Soft PVC material Bat logo keychains.

These are very impressive, well priced collectible items which will make Bat enthusiasts of all ages happy.

They are collectibles at the lower end of the budget range and this means that kids can save up with their pocket money and easily afford them themselves, It is a nice idea to give them the collecting bug early !



All of these items are fun, well made, robust and well packaged. They have lots of variations and different configurations and styles and there will be something here any everybody.

We have been lucky to score a load of these goodies, we have a nice selection of all different types from cars to patches, Q-Blox to charms.

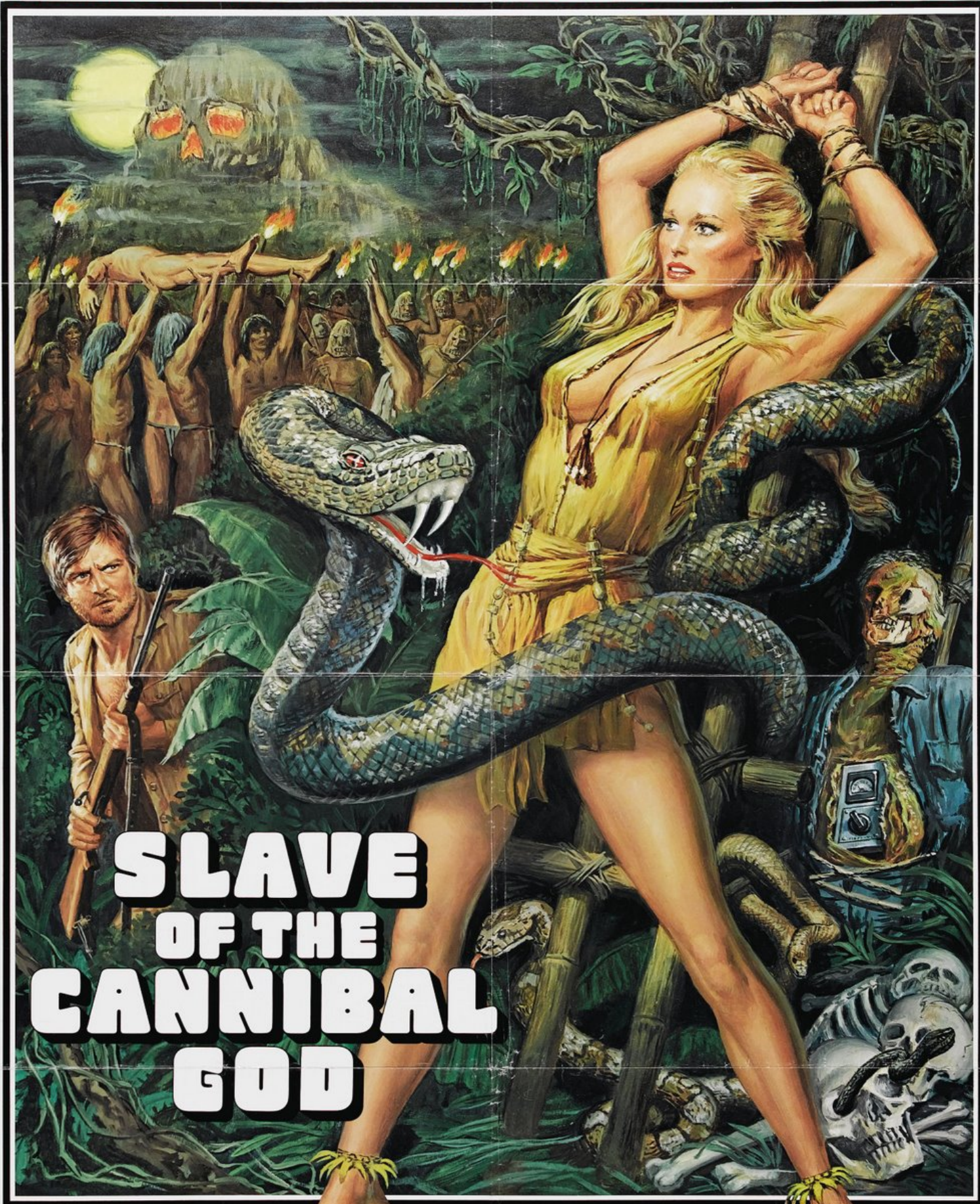
If you would like to win some send an email to promotions@synergy-magazine.com with "Send me some Bat Gear" code in the subject line.

It will be first in first served and the **prizes will be randomly chosen** with a couple per winner and we will keep running the giveaway until we run out !

It will open when the digital and print edition hits the website, so if you are reading this, get your entry in quick !

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THEIR CULT WAS DEATH...THEIR LUST WAS FOR BLOOD!



SLAVE OF THE CANNIBAL GOD

**"SLAVE OF
THE CANNIBAL GOD"**

STARRING **STACY KEACH**
CLAUDIO CASSINELLI

URSULA ANDRESS

Produced by **DANIA FILM-MEDUSA** DISTRIBUTION • Directed by **SERGIO MARTINO** • **EASTMANCOLOR®**

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